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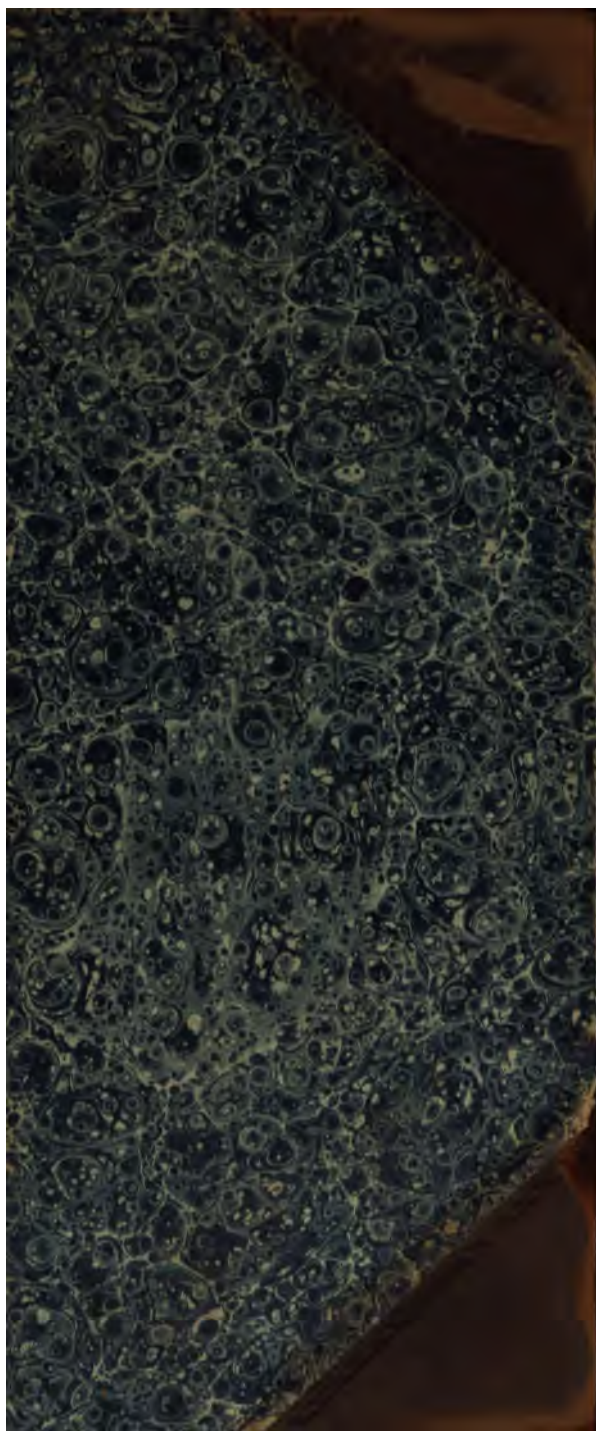
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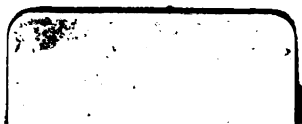
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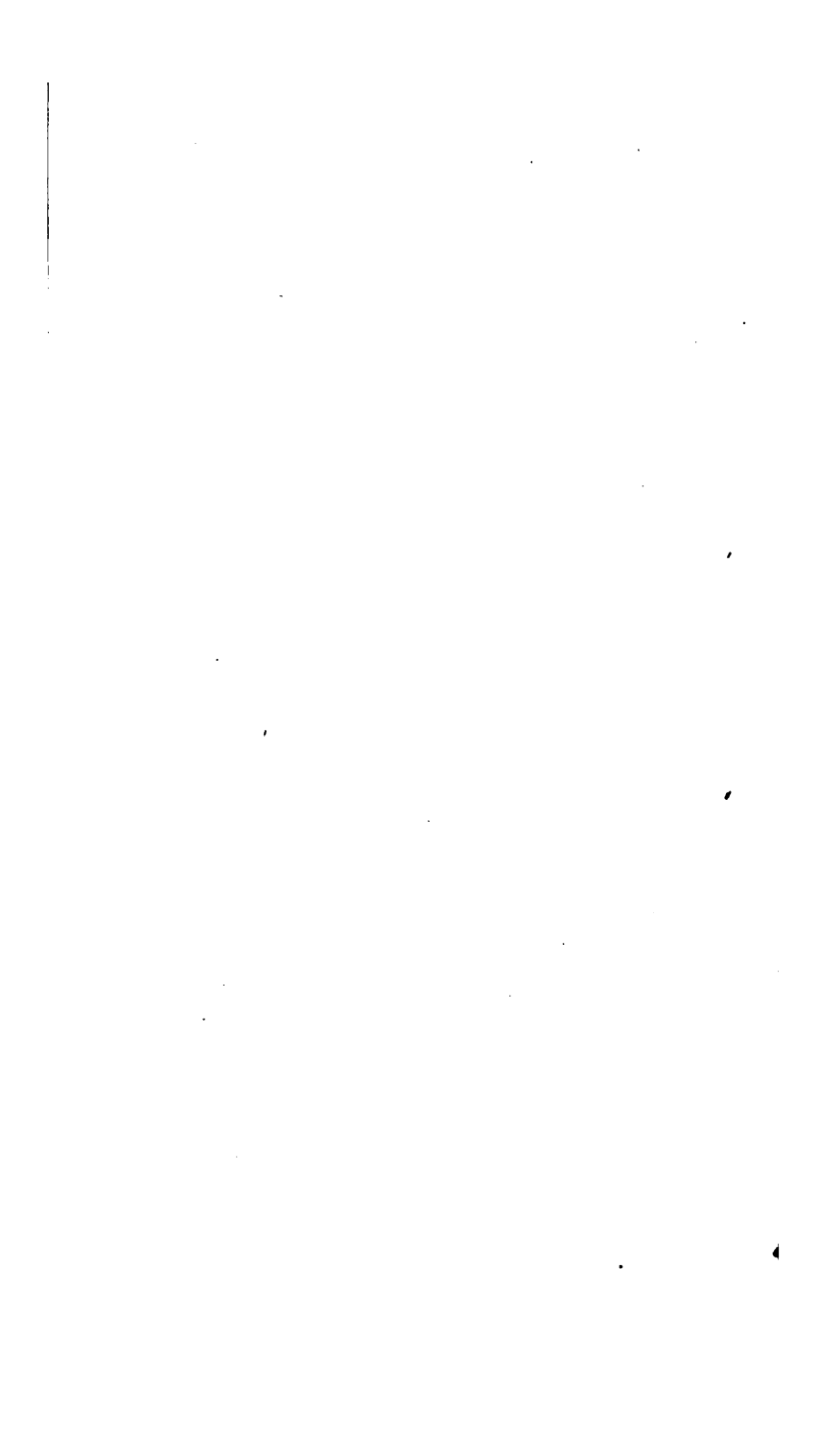
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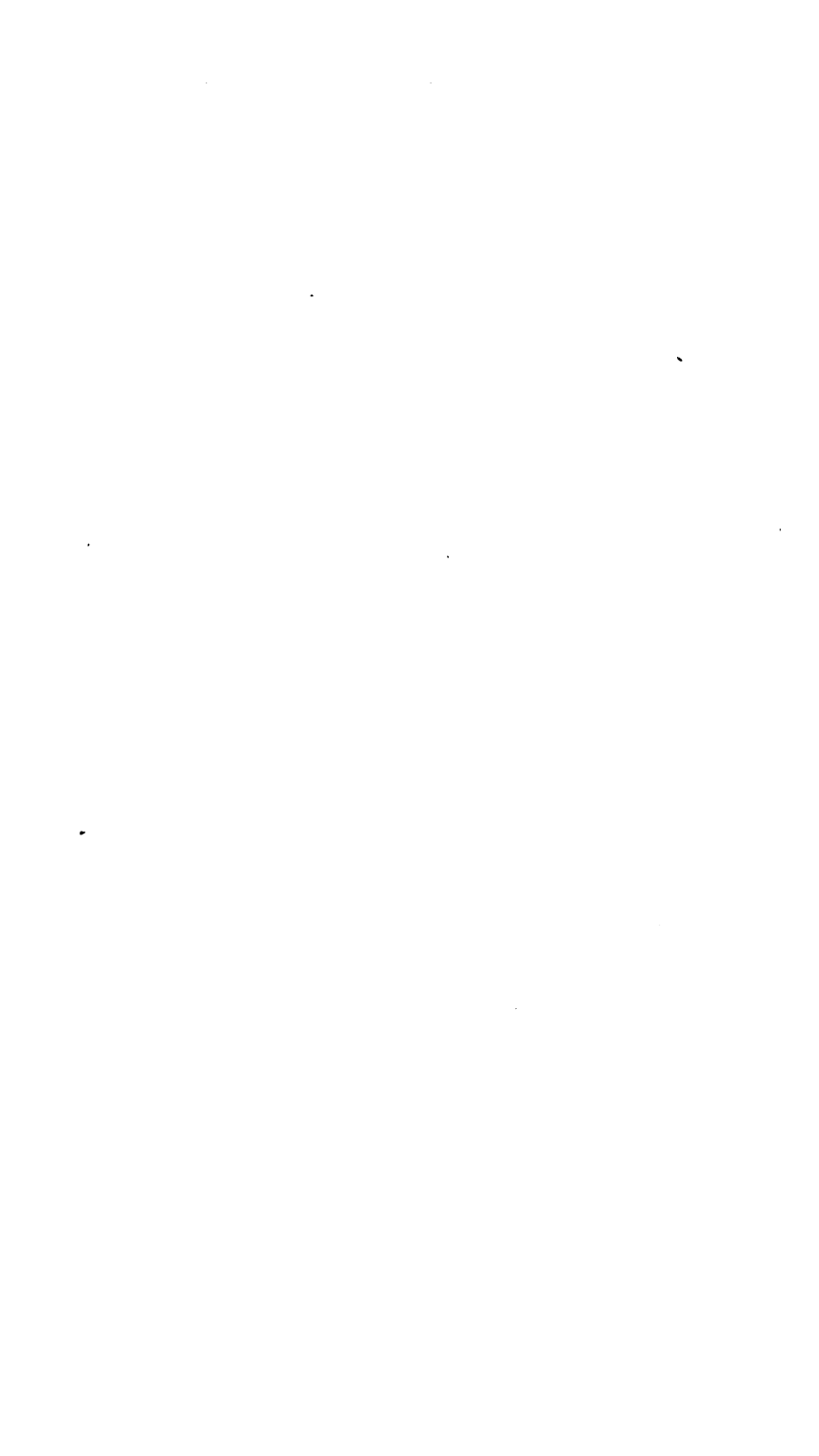
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APOSTOLIC INSTRUCTION EXEMPLIFIED.

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APOSTOLIC INSTRUCTION

EXEMPLIFIED IN

THE FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL
OF ST. JOHN.

PUBLISHED BY R. B. SEELEY AND W. BURNSIDE :
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AN EXPOSITION OF
THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN.



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THE
FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF JOHN.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

THE Scripture presents us with an important record in regard to the office of the Christian ministry. It is given of God, says the divinely-instructed Paul, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." And although these words undoubtedly express that the church, as a whole, is continually building up through the ministry of the word, so that one of the main offices of the preacher, is, through the Spirit's agency, "to add unto the church daily such as shall be saved;" it is also true, that this text implies that the pastors given of God are occupied, not only in promoting the increase and perfection of the body, as of one great whole, but the growth of every part in particular; every individual believer's advancement in grace and knowledge being as much the care of these faithful men, as the first conversion of sinners to their God. Nor can we err in

affirming that the most unequivocal mark of a divine ordination on the part of teachers, is the desire that they manifest *to advance their hearers in the knowledge of Christ*, and to promote their more perfect understanding in the mysteries of that kingdom of God, which consists “not in meat and drink,” i. e. in things external, ceremonial, or civil, but “in righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Ghost.” And this they have at heart, as it regards all learners in the school of Christ, in order that their joy in the Lord may be more full, and their peace in the Lord more fully established and uninterrupted; the end of such increased spiritual joy and peace being, as they know from Scripture testimony, and from the experience of their own souls, an increase of spiritual strength, a more vigorous life of faith, and a more energetic manifestation of those peculiar graces of the Spirit, which in their exercise redound to the glory of God. “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” So we read: and upon a conviction of the truth of this assertion, the spiritual labourers in the vineyard of the Lord, cease not to present to the view of the faithful, those objects which in their believing contemplation do most substantially rejoice the soul, and those considerations, by the help of which faith is enabled to cast her sure and stedfast anchor within the veil.

Amongst this class of teachers, so graciously provided by our Lord for the furtherance of his people’s joy, all who have spiritual discernment will acknowledge the apostle John to have been eminently skilled, as “a workman needing not to be ashamed;” and that his mode of teaching is admirably calculated to effect the object he had in view; even the *full* joy of the followers of Jesus. This proposed end of his instructions he opens

to us in the fourth verse of the first chapter of this epistle. He explicitly declares his object in these memorable words: "*These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.*" His intention, then, is obvious. He knew that faith—saving faith, might in very many cases exist where there was no corresponding joy; or at least no such joy, and above all, no such "fulness of joy," as in every case it ought to produce. And such a state of things he desired to remedy, being aware that it neither promoted the glory of God, nor the edification of the Church.

He would have believers "rooted and grounded" in the doctrine of the love of God; (not of their love to God, but of God's love to them) that being fully satisfied as to the reality of the "great love wherewith God hath loved them," a corresponding joy might possess their hearts;—a joy which should confirm the soul, and strengthen it against the power of sin. In the opening verse of the second chapter of this epistle, the apostle gives as a further reason for the consolatory instruction he is imparting to the churches, that he desires their establishment in holiness. He says, "*These things write I unto you, that ye sin not.*" And he knew that sin would be most effectually restrained in its baneful operation, by the counteracting influence of the love of God shed abroad in the heart.

The apostle had realized in his own experience the efficacy of deep and clear views of that love of Christ which passeth knowledge. He could say feelingly and experimentally, "We love him because he first loved us;" and hence his anxiety that others should also walk with him in that clear light of truth, which had been vouchsafed to his own favoured spirit. He knew also, with a brother apostle, that if by an act of special

grace on the part of the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, he had been in a peculiar manner admitted into joyful fellowship with the Triune Jehovah, this was for the consolation and salvation of the church, (2 Cor. i. 3—6.) and that his rich possessions of faith and love, dispensed to him from above by the Author of every good and perfect gift, had been bestowed, “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

In the title prefixed to the first of the three epistles which bear the name of the beloved disciple, the word *general* is added. And hence we learn that the apostle wrote for believers of every name and place, without distinction of particular churches; so that his doctrine was of universal application, and his precepts the common property of all the saints, whether they were saints at Corinth or at Rome, the beloved of God at Ephesus, or in any other place. This we know to be also true of every one of the epistles, not entitled general epistles, but written to particular churches: for take from the universal church the writings of the great apostle of the gentiles, and what do we do, but threaten the destruction of that edifice, which is the pillar and stay of the truth.

Nevertheless, the word *general*, found in the title of this Epistle of John, at once decides a point which some of the ignorant as well as crafty opponents of the faith may be disposed to dispute, in cases where the apostolic address is apparently more circumscribed. But let us not imagine, (for this would be an error of an equally pernicious kind, although not entertained with any premeditated hostility,) that the apostle John wrote only for the universal church existing in his own time, and not for their successors in the faith, even for us, whom

it has pleased the Lord our God to call, in a far distant age, and in a land, it may be, unknown to the inspired writer. Most assuredly the apostolic writings are the common heritage of the saints in every age and every clime. To us are these oracles of God committed; for us they were indited. And if John, and Paul, and Peter were in some respects ignorant of the individuals for whom they wrote; if it was not permitted them to see, through the vista of future years, the congregations of the saints, assembling in the uttermost parts of the habitable earth, there was yet a mind foreknowing our existence, a divine intelligence at work, inditing to the inspired penman every thought, and sentiment, and word of truth, as applicable to *our* state, *our* circumstances, *our* condition. And could it be otherwise? For is not our condition now, as believers in the Lord, precisely the same in all essential points with that of the first Christians? In external circumstances we may differ widely from them. We may live under different forms of temporal dominion, under different forms of ecclesiastical polity. Our civil institutions may be very dissimilar to theirs; our language, our customs, and our manners unlike. But as Christians, we possess the same faith with them, for there is but one faith; the same baptism, for there is only one; the same hope, for we are called in one hope of our calling. (Eph. iv. 4, 5.) We have also to contend with the very same enemies who have before tried the patience of our predecessors in the faith; we have the same law of sin to combat, the same world to overcome. We have need therefore of the same joy that they needed; and the fulness of joy which the beloved disciple desired that all the churches of his day should possess, it is expedient that we also should obtain. It is as necessary for us as for them;

as much for our growth in grace, as for theirs, that we too should behold "the manner of love wherewith the Father hath loved us"; that we also should contemplate that love of Christ which passeth knowledge; and so, with unveiled face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, "become changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."

CHAPTER I.

1. *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life.*
2. *(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you, that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us ;)*
3. *That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us : and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*
4. *And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.*

THE first thing that arrests our notice in commencing the perusal of John's epistle, is this, that it has no introduction of any kind. The apostle does not name himself at all ; nor does he offer to his readers those salutations of grace and peace, which are usual with the apostolic writers in the commencement of their epistles. We perceive a similar absence of the accustomed greeting in the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews ; but with that second exception, all the other epistles commence with the same forms of benediction. Nor need we be surprised at the variety observable on these two occa-

sions ; much less can we infer any lack of affection on the part of the writers, at the moment of their opening these particular epistles. But we may rather infer the contrary of this, and trace the specified omission to this source ; that such was the all-absorbing influence produced on the minds of the writers, by the subject-matter they were about to lay before their readers, that the ordinary forms of epistolary address were omitted. These were overlooked in their overpowering love and zeal, and intense desire at once to present to the faithful, that Jesus, who, apprehended by faith, would *give* the blessings which they could only *invoke* on their behalf. The apostle then at once, and without any preliminary address, proposes to his pupils in the faith, the chief object of their faith, its Author and Finisher, and he opens this epistle very much in the same way that he begins the gospel that bears his name, his object on both occasions being the same. He would first have the disciples well-grounded in the doctrine of the true and proper divinity of the Son of God, without which he knew there would be no solid foundation of their faith, and no ground of perfect confidence upon which to establish a full joy. Upon this rock, then, he begins to build, shewing that Christ was “ *that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.* ”

From this grand primary truth he sets out, assured that no other doctrine would so effectually introduce his brethren into that fellowship with the Father and the Son, which he so greatly desired they should realize. We may observe that the apostle Paul, in the epistle of his to which we have before referred, adopts a similar mode of instruction, when he is preparing to lead on the Hebrew converts beyond the elementary principles of the Gospel. First, he shews them that

Christ was very and true God, "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person," and afterwards he proceeds to set him forth as the great High Priest, the all-atoning Sacrifice, the all-sufficient Mediator. And from observing the course adopted by Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews, and by John upon two different occasions; first in the opening of his Gospel, and again in the commencement of this Epistle, we may properly infer, that such views of the deity of Christ, and divine dignity of his person, as are presented to us in the Scripture, although they may be abstruse, must nevertheless be apprehended by the believer's faith, if in compliance with the apostolic precept, he desires to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And let us observe that in setting forth to the church "the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh," the apostle John does not make the announcement of what is to be the believer's orthodox creed, as though he were providing him with a matter of speculation only. For with what an intense and fervid zeal, and with what a clear evidence of truth does he prove to us that his own faith was a matter of *experience*, that all his conceptions and contemplations were a divine reality; that *his creed was his life*; the very life of his illumined spirit!

Let us examine the import of some of his remarkable words in the first three verses of this chapter, and we shall find a beautiful and striking picture of what faith should be in every case; and what it is in every case, where the Lord is pleased to carry on "the work of faith with power."

First, the description which the apostle gives of his own faith, may lead us to observe that his knowledge of the incarnate God commenced "by the hearing

of faith." He says "*that which we have heard ;*" and so he confirms the declaration of Paul, that "faith cometh by hearing;" for there must be a report of the truth preceding its reception in the mind. This report is not always, and of necessity, received through the outward ear, although by the divine appointment of the ordinance of preaching, we may infer that it is according to the will of God, that usually it should be so received. That report of the truth which is productive of faith, may be made to the mental ear by a written communication. For the Spirit of the Lord is not confined in its operations to any single mode of administration ; as we read in 1 Cor. xii. 5, 6. But in every case, where faith exists, there has been a previous presentation of the objects of faith ; else the mind had for ever remained in its natural ignorance.

Of this there can be no doubt, for as the apostle in writing to the Romans argues, "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher?" In every case there must be a preacher, although the precise form of the ministration may not be all-important.

The Lord will himself determine in every individual case, and on every occasion, whether he will address our souls through the medium of another's speech, and by the words of a man's mouth, or, laying aside the use of language, by the silent rhetoric of pen and ink, or the intervention of the printer's art. These remarks in regard to the hearing of faith, are not unimportant, because there are persons who presume that the Lord teaches his people in many cases, by a revelation made immediately to the mind of the individual, and this independently of the teaching of men, or the reading of the Scripture; in short without the use of external

means. That such was the case in the experience of Paul, and the other apostles, not to mention the ancient prophets, appointed of God to promulgate the truth in the first instance, we can have no doubt, for the Scripture testifies to the fact. But from the histories of Cornelius the centurion, and of the Ethiopian eunuch, we infer, that when the Lord will visit any soul of man with saving knowledge, he ordinarily does it by the ministry of a Philip or a Peter. The word of God is full of like cases, and indeed the whole work of the ministry proceeds upon the acknowledgment of the divine purpose in this particular.

And so clear is the fact, that nothing but the wilful blindness of the natural understanding, and the carnal enmity of the heart against God, could induce the notion, that the use of the ordinary and obvious modes of instruction can be dispensed with, except at the risk of the soul perishing for lack of knowledge. The word in the Greek Testament translated "*heard*," often signifies with the inspired writers, an *obedient hearing*. It is such a hearing of the proposed truth as issues in the conviction of the mind, and more than this, such a hearing as disposes the mind to submit itself to the doctrine presented; it is in this way that faith springs up, and from hence its origin. But let it not be imagined that such an effect takes place, or ever can take place, by the unprevented will of man. The Lord by his special grace induces the result. "Faith is of the operation of God." It is his gift, and like every good and perfect gift, is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, who of his own will begets his people by the word of truth, that they should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures. (James i. 16—18.) When addressing the gracious Author of his faith, the

favoured child of man thus speaks : " Mine ears hast thou opened." To his God he ascribes that circumcision of the ear, as well as of the heart, without which he had remained deaf to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely ; and but for which, the Good Shepherd had in vain called his wandering sheep by name. (John x. 3.)

The apostle next marks out to us the progressive work of faith by the expression, "*which we have seen with our eyes.*" First, " by the hearing of faith," and mental act of obedient and submissive reception of the truth, the understanding becomes enlightened. Those " who were sometimes darkness become light in the Lord." And in God's light, now for the first time dawning on the soul, they see light (Psalm xxxvi. 9.) even the light of " the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God" ; " the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." We have an example of such a progressive experience of faith in the history of the Samaritan woman, and the men of Sychar, recorded in the fourth chapter of the gospel of John. We read that " many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Jesus for the saying of the woman," who had reported to them the Lord's gracious conversation with her at the well. And then it follows, that many of these individuals came unto Jesus ; whom having seen, and with whom conversing, " they said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." This vision of faith is also set before us in our Lord's discourse with Thomas and Philip in John xiv. 7—9. " Philip saith unto Jesus, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us ;" upon which request of the disciple, our Lord ex-

postulates with him on the slow progress of his faith, intimating that he ought long ago to have seen the Father. For he would have known and *seen Christ as one with the Father*, had he diligently hearkened to his discourses, and had he in faith received the testimony that Jesus had previously given concerning himself. By yielding an obedient ear to the doctrine of Christ who had been so long time with him, he had surely obtained by faith a sight of "the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," and beholding that glory of the Son, would have attained also to the vision of the Father; for Christ is "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person." "Whosoever has seen me," says Jesus, "has seen the Father;" and let this blessed truth suffice to quiet the apprehensions of those who, although they have seen Jesus, still doubt whether they have seen the Father. Having seen Jesus with the eye of faith, we have seen the Father, that is, we have seen God reconciled to us in his Son. For the Father's attributes are discovered in the person of his Son. God is surely reconciled to us, and will receive us, and be to us a Father, for we behold Jesus to be a most loving, gracious Saviour. Does the soul ask, Is God indeed my Father by adoption and grace, and will he own a rebel such as I am for his child? The answer is at hand, if we have by faith seen Jesus going in quest of the wandering sheep, and have heard Him call upon ourselves by name. The reply can only be in the affirmative. Yes; God is my Father. I have seen the Father. I have seen the mighty being who stands to me in the honoured and endeared relation of a Father; for I have seen Christ, and he has left it upon record, "Whosoever has seen me has seen the Father." Certainly, a believing sight of Christ, "as

the way, the truth, and the life," is accompanied by the vision of the Father. If Jesus be seen, the Father is also revealed, for he says, "I and my Father are one." And how incomparably lovely is that manifestation of himself which the Father gives us in the face of his dear Son! Out of Christ we dare not look on him, "for our God is a consuming fire." His attributes cannot be contemplated by sinners such as we are. Even the angels who have not sinned, veil their faces in his august presence, and how shall we, who dwell in houses of clay, in corruptible bodies of sinful flesh, venture to gaze upon his holiness, and justice, and truth; perfections of the divine nature all armed against guilty man? But in the person of Jesus, instead of terror we have only paternal kindness—a benignant lustre encircles the Father's brow. The beams of the divine glory do not strike us dead; rather they infuse a new and eternal life into our souls. We look and live.

The progress of faith, from hearing to sight, is also marked out in the interesting and ever-memorable experience of Job, as it is recorded in the book that bears his name. There we find the saint who had passed through a purifying process of no ordinary kind, thus describing his consciousness of progress in the life of faith. (chap. xlii. 5.) "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee." Here two distinct states of the believing soul are indicated; hearing, and sight; and sight is expressive of an advance in the knowledge of God. In the case of Job, the opening of the spiritual eye discovered to him in connexion with the vision of God, another sight of a very humiliating and appalling kind. He saw *himself* in his native sin; as one "conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity." No longer the righteous Job, the "per-

fect man," the most upright of the children of men; but a sinner, a miserable sinner, defiled in every part; unclean! unclean! He had before loathed the pollutions of his diseased and grievously-afflicted body. Now he perceives the still more hateful pollutions of his soul, and abhors himself on their account. He had already in the anguish of his degraded state, and by reason of his corporeal malady, sat himself down among the ashes. (chap. ii. 8.) But now in the perception of his still greater humiliation by reason of his sin, he falls prostrate in the dust. (chap. lxii. 5.) And to this view of himself, so distressing, but so necessary and so profitable, Job, it seems, had attained by a previous sight of the divine majesty. First he saw the holy God: then his own impurity. God's inflexible and perfect righteousness: then his own unrighteousness; Happy Job! thrice happy! that before such discoveries were made to the opened eyes of thine understanding, thou hadst already attained, by the hearing of faith, to a knowledge of God thy Saviour! Thou hadst been taught, and wast persuaded that thy Redeemer was living, and that he was to be manifested in the flesh for thy sake! (chap. xix. 25.) And surely his proper worth thou couldest not have known, hadst thou remained unconscious of thy great need of such a Saviour. But thine iniquity being revealed to thee, the mighty deliverer was at hand. Already thou hadst heard of him, "who should come out of Zion, and should turn away ungodliness from Jacob." Happy Job!—that in the fearful hour of the sight of thine own sin, thou hadst previously

• believed in the record of the grace and love of Jesus, about to be displayed "in the latter day upon the earth." For then, in the hour of thy soul's extremity, thou hadst no need to say, "who shall ascend into

heaven ? (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or who shall descend into the deep ? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead ;) for the word was nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart, even the word of faith," preached, as thou didst know, to the elect church from the fall of man to thine own time ; that " if thou shouldest confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thy heart that God would raise him from the dead, thou shouldest be saved." (Rom. x. 6—9, &c. and Deut. xxx, 11—14.) To such a knowledge of faith as this, can we doubt that righteous Job had attained ? He must have possessed it, when he spoke so confidently of his own future resurrection in connexion with the fact of his Redeemer's advent. For how should such a connexion have existed in the mind of Job, had he not known that his Redeemer should first die for his sins, and then be raised again for his justification, and that in virtue of that death and resurrection of his Lord, he too should be raised from the dead, and in his flesh see God ? (chap. xix. 25—27.) Surely Job had attained this knowledge by the hearing of faith, and the vast importance of such instruction is most apparent in his case ; for without it how could he have endured his accumulated trials, and how support his weighty sorrows ? How retain his confidence, when it seemed as though God counted him as one of his enemies ? (chap. xix. 11.) And how support the sight of a holy God, and the full discovery of his own sin, up to that hour so imperfectly revealed ?

A very pleasing, but not more profitable view of the progressive work of faith, in the addition of the organ of spiritual sight to the previously-imparted sense of hearing, is afforded us in the account given of certain Greeks in the twelfth chapter of John's gospel. These

individuals, it would appear, were uncircumcised Gentiles, and not "of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh." But it is also evident that they had received from the gracious God, "who is the God, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles," "that blessedness which cometh not only upon the circumcision, but upon the uncircumcision also." That the Lord had vouchsafed to these favoured persons the spiritual circumcision of the ear, and that "faith which cometh by hearing,"—we are sure from the circumstance recorded of them, that they came up to worship at the feast. The report of Jehovah's deity as the one God of heaven and earth, and as the God who by special revelation, had made himself known to the Jewish nation, must have reached them before, when serving the idols of their own people; and upon the hearing of the name and marvellous works of the God of Israel, it is plain that they had abandoned the worship of their false gods, and now sought to honour and serve him "who alone is God over all, blessed for ever." Nor did they imagine, as the philosophy of man has often taught, that it mattered very little, if at all, under what name, and with what species of homage, God was worshipped; for that in fact it was immaterial whether he was approached as Jehovah, Jove, or Lord, or in this or that peculiar manner. Their conviction of the truth in this particular was very different; and believing that God would only be addressed in a mode prescribed by himself, and not in any way of man's devising, their zeal for the worship of the true God brought them to Jerusalem. And there it was that new "tidings of great joy" met their ears. The name of Jesus was proclaimed to them; his mighty works recounted; his matchless words and deeds; all testifying that he was

“ the Messiah, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write.” And what followed this announcement of the manifestation of the Son of God? How did these Greek worshippers receive the news of Messiah’s advent? “ The same came therefore to Philip, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would *see* Jesus.” And can we suppose that the gratification of this desire, only afforded satisfaction to that natural eye, which, according to the scripture testimony, “ is never satisfied with seeing?” (Eccles. i. 8.) In many cases, as in that of Herod, mere curiosity might have prompted a desire to behold the blessed Jesus. But in the case of these Greeks it was far otherwise, and when they looked on “ the Word made flesh,” surely they “ beheld his glory, even the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” They did indeed *see* Jesus; and so as no eye of man can see him, except it be first anointed with the eye-salve of faith. (Rev. iii. 18.) The vision, for which perhaps they had long waited, came in its appointed season. It surely came and did not tarry; (Hab. ii. 3.) and so in their experience of the manifold grace of God, and acknowledgment of his gracious work in the bestowment of a new gift, they would feelingly repeat the saying of the scripture: “ the hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.”

The latter part of that clause of the first verse which is under our consideration, gives much additional force to the apostle’s description of a realizing faith. He says, “ which we have seen with *our* eyes.” So also Job, when referring to that sight of his Redeemer which by faith he anticipated; “ whom I shall see for *myself*, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.” And as “ every man must give an account of *himself* to God,”

so it is evident, that each must for himself obtain the vision of "that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us." It does not suffice to behold him that was from the beginning, through the eyes of another, even if that other were an inspired apostle, and such an one as the beloved John himself. Such an imperfect vision of Christ will not issue in the full joy of faith. It is only when we can say with John, "which we have seen with *our* eyes," that we shall also be able to testify with him, "truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

"*Which we have looked upon.*" The Apostle is not weary of describing faith's various actings in the soul. And it is for our edification that he sets before us his own experience in this matter. It is in order that such of us as have heard and seen Jesus, may still fix on him the eyes of our understanding, with an intent and protracted gaze. And can one view of "the King in his beauty," satisfy the spiritual eye? No; it will rest with a mingled feeling of sorrow and joy, on him whom our sins have pierced; upon the gracious, loving Lord, who in order that he might impart to us that eternal life which he had in himself, "took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross." When Jesus has been seen, as "full of grace and truth,"—"fairer than the children of men,"—"the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely," the believer will surely look upon him with a steady contemplation of the soul, and fixed devotion of the heart. It may be, that it is not given to all believers to attain to the full experience of the beloved disciple, or to realize all he felt when he says, "which we have looked upon;" but in a measure, in a degree, the same contemplative faith is proper to all the saints.

And without it, there could be no due assimilation to the image of Christ, no growing up unto "the full measure of his stature. It is by the contemplation of Christ's person, that we become in a measure changed into his likeness. There is a transforming power accompanying the *looking upon Jesus* with the eye of faith. The apostle says, "We all with unveiled face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Cor. iii. 18. And the more fixed and abiding the contemplation, the greater the transforming efficacy. In the proportion that we look on Jesus, in that same proportion are we delivered from our sins. Our faithful contemplation of the Lord will ever be the measure of our holiness of heart and life. Do we look on Jesus as the Lamb slain to take away the sin of the world? Then we hate the sin that needed such a sacrifice. Do we behold him as the good Samaritan, binding up the wounds of the man who fell among thieves, and pouring therein oil and wine? Presently we draw near to the same Jesus, pleading with him, that *our* "wounds and bruises and putrifying sores," need also the mollifying ointment of his Spirit, and the strengthening cordial of his grace. We look upon Jesus, carrying on his shoulder the sheep he had sought and found in the wilderness, and we beseech him to carry us too, lest we perish by the way. Again we see our Jesus encircled with publicans and sinners who draw near to hear him, and the Spirit whispers in our hearts, (words once spoken in derision,) "*This* man receiveth *sinners* and *eateth* with them." (Luke xv. 1, 2.) And then it is we come to Jesus with a child-like confidence, for we are sinners, and he receiveth such. And we could willingly look and look still upon

the Man who receiveth sinners, did not the Spirit take of other of the things of Christ and shew them unto us. Sometimes he would have us to look upon Jesus, not only dying for our sins, but rising again for our justification ; and then it is that we perceive that we are not only free from all sin, but righteous in God's sight. Again, the Holy Ghost shews us the Saviour, seated at God's right hand and ever living to make intercession for us. And then we look upon Jesus in the heavens, with a perfect confidence that our cause cannot miscarry in that court where he presides ; where he is advocate, and also Judge. Oh how various and endless are our views of Christ, when he is looked upon by faith! " His goings forth, on our behalf, are from everlasting," and we may add, they are to everlasting. Looking back upon Jesus, into an eternity past, we find that " his delights were with the sons of men." (Prov. viii. 31.) His thoughts were then engaged upon that people who were written in his book of life. And looking forward into an eternity to come, we behold him still occupied in the salvation of his saints ; for we read, " The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto fountains of living waters ; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

" *And our hands have handled of the word of life.*" Without this concluding sentence, the Apostle's description of the experience of faith had been imperfect ; for wherever the Lord carries on " the work of faith with power," there is on the believer's part an appropriation to himself of that eternal life, which he has heard, seen, and looked upon by faith. There is, as John expresses it, a *handling* of the word of life. And probably the expression, " which our hands have handled," denotes some sensible experience of

our union with the Lord Jesus, and a consciousness that we are within the bonds of the covenant of grace, so that by the aid of the Holy Ghost, we can say with Paul, "He loved *me* and gave himself for *me*." "Laying hold on eternal life," and apprehending Christ with a faith which says, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," we are blessed indeed, and exclaim in the language of faith's assurance, "*My* Lord, and *my* God."

As on a previous occasion we noticed the additional force of the words, "with *our* eyes," so here again, we may observe how the Apostle gives additional strength to his meaning, by a similar form of speech; "which *our* hands have handled." By this he marks how personal as well as experimental was his own faith; and we may infer, that if we possess like precious faith, it should enable us, each one for himself, so to apprehend Christ, as to know of a truth, that he has made our individual peace with God, and has fully reconciled us to the Father. The assurance that we are interested in all the promises of grace, mercy, and peace, made in Christ to a world dead in sin, is the blessed effect of our having thus handled the word of life. But nothing short of an experimental union with the Lord, can produce this assurance. We hear, we see, we look upon the blessed Jesus. And all this is well. For happy are the ears that hear, and the eyes that see that Christ, whom prophets and righteous men desired to see, yet saw him not, as he is clearly manifested unto us. But that our joy may be full, and our fellowship with the Father and the Son complete, we must lay hold, not only on the garment of the Lord, but on the Lord himself. And then shall we know, by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, that we are "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh;" even that mystical bride

for whose sake he endured the humiliation and agony of the cross.

Now this experience of "handling with our hands the word of life, can only become intelligible to any of us, by the special and peculiar teaching of God the Holy Ghost. It is one of the spiritual matters which is foolishness to the natural man; because it is spiritually discerned. To the ignorance of the unenlightened, it appears a species of enthusiasm to enlarge on such a subject; and presumption as well as folly, for any to attest that they have attained in spirit to the experience of faith described by the Apostle. And some who cannot be classed with the ignorant or carnally-minded, are yet fearful of insisting too much on the *assurance* of faith, lest on the one hand, presumption be the consequence, and on the other hand despair. It may be asserted however, without fear of contradiction from the word of God, that vital saving faith cannot be certainly ascertained to exist, except its reality is attested by a consciousness and belief of the fact, that we are personally interested in the covenant of grace. Nor have we any warrant for supposing, as some do, that larger measures of the assurance of faith were vouchsafed to the first Christians, than we may reasonably now expect. This opinion, if it does not strike at the very root of faith, sadly tends to check and stunt the growth of that plant of heavenly planting. No one promise or high attainment of faith is peculiar to the apostolic age, except it be the promises made individually to the apostles themselves, in connexion with their office. Not only to apostles and primitive believers was it given spiritually to hear, see, look upon, and handle with their own hands the word of life; the same experience of faith is as necessary

for us as for them. And "as face answereth to face in a glass," and (in his natural state) "the heart of man to man," so in his renewed state, and when under the influence of faith, the same indications take place, in a measure at least, in every individual case. There is the same hearing ear, and seeing eye, and the same hand omnipotent in faith, laying hold upon the angel of the covenant, whilst the heart exclaims with the patriarch of old, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." And but for such a realizing faith, but for such internal perceptions, and workings, and actings, of the soul, how shall faith in any case be ascertained to be real? Now the experiences that have been described, are such as do not leave the soul in doubt whether it has faith or not. Where they exist, there is no doubt as to the existence of faith. That power of consciousness, by which the mind has an immediate knowledge of its own operations, discovers to the subject of these experiences, that in them he possesses the scriptural faith of God's elect. The testimony of consciousness is unerring; but if such a consciousness of faith be wanting, where is faith? The apostle Paul describes faith to be "*the evidence of things not seen.*" Faith is then itself the witness of those spiritual truths which are not revealed to the natural man; and faith is itself the testimony of the reality of those things which it discovers and apprehends. And shall faith be generally and universally "*the evidence of things not seen,*" and shall it not also give evidence of *itself* at the same time? The discussions that are carried on, on the subject of faith and its evidences, are often of a highly objectionable kind. For the fact of faith's existence in the heart, is too commonly supposed to be more properly ascertained by its *external fruits*, than by look-

ing within the soul for its internal marks. But such an error, and such a mode of instruction tends entirely to reverse the order which should be observed. The inside of the cup and platter must be first ascertained to be clean. So our Lord directs. The existence of faith in the soul should be ascertained, not in the first place by any external fruits, but by the consciousness that we possess the hearing ear, which loves "the truth as it is in Jesus," and the seeing eye, which, enamoured with his beauty, looks on Him, in whom by nature we discern neither form nor comeliness. But above all, by the consciousness, that in the discovery of our lost state by reason of sin, we have come to God the Father in the name of his Son, imploring for his sake to be admitted into the bond of the covenant of grace. And here is the witness of faith, and its only really satisfactory evidence; *That we have sued for the proffered blessing, and have obtained the same.* Faith does not only reveal the heavenly gift; it puts us in possession of the gift. Faith discovers to us Christ, as the beloved of the Father, in whom he is well pleased. But faith shews us more than this. It reveals to us, that because we desire to be saved by this Christ, we *shall* be saved by him; nay more, that we *are* saved by him with an everlasting salvation. Faith does not hear of Jesus, see him, look on him, and then conclude that her work is finished. The crowning act remains behind: the work is still incomplete. Jesus must be possessed. He must be known to be our own. All is worthless if we fail of *possessing* Christ. Without him we are yet in our sins. But when we have really made him our own by special acts of faith, how clear is the assurance that he is ours. There is no doubt in the mind. We have done our part; all we can do, and all that God has told us to do;

and will not God perform his part? Will he fail the spiritual David? (Psalm lxxxix. 35.) Will he break the covenant "ordered in all things and sure?" Faith knows that this is impossible. "God is not a man that he should lie, nor the Son of Man that he should repent. Hath he said and will he not do it; and has he spoken and will he not bring it to pass?"

Then faith infers, and knows of a truth, that Jesus is her own, for he receives *all*, and gives himself to *all*, "who come to God by him." The listless unconcern, the apathy, the indifference, to say nothing of the enmity and contempt with which the generality of professing Christians treat the subject of the internal evidence of faith, makes it of the utmost consequence, that this all-important matter should be again and again discussed, and made as prominent as possible. The mistake, which is so common, about faith and its evidences, must be opposed, and that perseveringly.

No sort of false charity must be shown to those who dissemble and pervert the doctrine of the evidence of faith. It is an act of suicide towards our own souls to flinch from the declaration of the whole truth in this particular; and we dishonour God the Holy Ghost, by putting contempt on his most gracious work, whenever we fail to ascribe to faith, the effects which the word of God ascribes to it. And in vain shall any presume, (as so many do in the blindness and hardness of their hearts,) that such works as God will approve, can by any possibility be produced, except there be first of all in the heart, the unquestionable evidence of saving faith. Too many of our teachers direct us almost exclusively, to judge of our faith by our works of a legal kind. If they direct us to judge of its existence, by our works of an evangelical kind, they are also wrong; but in the

former case, there is concealed enmity against the truth of God lodged in the heart ; in the latter, perhaps more of ignorance than actual aversion to the truth itself. The doctrine to which we must cling, as to the only anchor which can save the frail bark of our perishing souls, is this ; that we are "*saved by faith* :"—that we are saved by faith *without works*, whether they be legal or evangelical works. And moreover, that faith is its own evidence in the soul, and cannot need any other.

How many are satisfied that they possess justifying faith, because they have been led to consider their moral lives a sufficient evidence of the fact ! They look without, and not within. Hence they do not discover that they are without the internal marks of "the faith of God's elect." But Paul, when directing the Corinthian church to examine into the reality of their faith, appeals to the fact, that Christ is in the believer's heart. "Know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates ?" And *there* he must be looked for, in his manifestations of grace, and peace, and knowledge. That text is for the most part forgotten ; "As a man *thinketh in his heart, so is he* : " and also that after all, the main question is, "What *think ye of Christ* ? "

How speciously does that deception work in the minds of many, that the tree being known by its fruits, if only we can produce good fruits, we may infer that the tree is good !

And what sort of external fruits are these, which make the scrutiny and analysis of the principle of faith unnecessary ? We shall find almost always, if we examine them, that they are in fact, not even the *external* marks of *saving faith*, but only moral works, which the natural man can perform, without the special

aid of regenerating and sanctifying grace. But even if these works were apparently such works as are proper to the believer, still no evidence exists, that faith did really produce them. To the eye of man, they may look well ; “ but the Lord looketh on the heart.” It is there he looks for faith. It is there he seeks the image of his Son, in whom he is well pleased. He knows whether the heart has been “ purified by faith.” And if it has not, all its doings are an abomination in his sight. Be the works ever so good, and ever so much like the works of faith ; even if they are wrought by the aid of the Holy Ghost, who is in a limited sense the author of *all* good works, still the works are profitless as it regards any proof that we have faith, if the internal evidence of faith be wanting.

Let us not consider it unimportant to dwell upon the internal evidence of faith, since, to the possession of faith, God has annexed the gift of eternal life. “ Believe, and thou shalt be saved,” is the language of scripture. Not, Believe and work, but only, “ Believe.” The true faith of the heart is the one thing necessary to salvation, for this true faith of the heart puts us in possession of that Christ who is the true God, and eternal life. Then it is expedient that we look well into our hearts, for out of them proceed the issues of life and death. If faith be in our hearts, all is essentially right. Its external fruits may as yet be exceedingly imperfect ; but in due time they will ripen and exhibit a better appearance. The wheat that fills the garner of the husbandman, all sprang from seed which once lay hidden in the earth. The owner of the soil was conscious of the fact that good seed was sown in his ground. He was aware of all the circumstances attending those first operations of husbandry which had already taken place. There-

fore he anticipated with considerable confidence, that in due season he should reap a crop of ripened grain. But to the eye of the ignorant observer, the field duly sown, exhibited no promise of any future harvest. He knew not that seed had been lodged within that apparently sterile earth, which would ere long repay the labour of the husbandman. And it is so oftentimes in the matter of faith. The individual possessor of the precious gift, is alone conscious that a supernatural and divine husbandry has been commenced in his heart, that the fallow ground has been broken up, and that the sower has sown the incorruptible seed of the word. What new thoughts possess his soul, what new affections, what new desires ! But that heart alone knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not intermeddle with its joys. And it may be, no *striking, external* marks of faith appears as yet, for “the kingdom of God *cometh* not with observation.” When it is *come*, it shall be apparent. But it is now “like unto leaven hid in three measures of meal.” The conscious heart knows that it has faith, for Jesus the object of faith is revealed ; and it “endures as seeing him who is invisible.” In its first struggles with the law, and sin, and death, it endures ; by faith pleading with the Father that he has promised to give eternal life for Jesus’ sake. Meanwhile, the new-born soul, formed indeed “in secret,” and as it were, “in the lower parts of the earth,” is harassed and perplexed by the promulgation of a spurious gospel, which is no gospel, but the law. The infant spirit hungers and thirsts for “the sincere milk of the word, that it may grow thereby.” But no such aliment is provided for its use, by those whose office it is to feed the lambs. Far from it. The new-born babes are not encouraged with the assurance that in

due time they shall reap if they faint not. They are alarmed by intimations that enthusiasm is often mistaken for faith, and that delusive fancies occupy that time which would be better employed, were it devoted to the performance of active duties. Not that such guides do themselves perform any of the duties they enjoin, nor are the babes in Christ deficient in such duties ; but Satan does in this way labour continually to impede the early work of grace in the soul, and to prevent the more perfect entrance of that word which giveth light.

The carnal mind is ever at variance with God, " for it is not subject to his law, neither indeed can be." It does indeed affect at all times a great zeal for certain portions of the law of works, which yet it does not perform in the spirit ; but as to the obedience of the law of faith, to this it is altogether opposed. When man was to be justified by works, he broke the law. Now that the law of works is set aside as the means of his justification, man is disobedient still, and prefers the former abrogated law, which he says he will obey and keep, and be justified thereby, if not wholly, yet at least in part ; and that he will prove his possession of a justifying faith, (which indeed he has not obtained,) by the due performance of external works, which nevertheless he only performs in the letter and not in the spirit, and to the praise of man, and not to the glory of God. The error also of the regenerate believer is great, when he looks without, and not within his heart, for the evidence of justifying faith. Some appear afraid to give credit to the inward witness, as though it might deceive them ; but they will believe in the reality of the work of faith, provided God the Holy Ghost will first work on their behalf, and for their more perfect conviction, other signs and wonders, more and greater than those which he has

already wrought in them and for them, when he imparted to them the faith of the heart, with all its new perceptions, affections, and desires. That is to say, in other words, they will believe in the reality of the internal marks of the divine gift they have received, whenever the actual sight of the ripened grain, shall prove that good seed must of necessity have been previously sown. When they are enabled to produce works *of a satisfactory kind*, they will believe they have faith, but not till then. But how shall the Holy Ghost vouchsafe us any evidence of faith greater or more convincing than the internal evidence of seeing, hearing, looking on, and handling the Lord Jesus Christ? Can any external works, however good or holy, be so convincing an evidence of faith as the actual possession of faith itself and of the objects of faith? Or by looking at our works, even at those wrought in faith, can we so readily see Jesus, and be assured that he is ours, as by the more simple and immediate process of looking for him in our hearts, where he is revealed as the God of our salvation? And why is it that we at all desire any evidence of the reality of our faith? Is it not, that we may know that Christ is ours, and that with him, eternal life is ours? That possessing Jesus, we have peace with God, are delivered from all trespasses, and invested with a perfect righteousness? But this knowledge is acquired previously to the performance of a single external work of faith. For the tree must be made good before the fruit can be good. So says our Divine Teacher. And can it be, that the operation by the Spirit, of the engrafting of our souls into Christ, is a work unknown to ourselves? How is it possible, that the stupendous work of the formation within our hearts of a new creature, should be doubtful, or need external

proof? Does not the travail of the new-birth attest the fact that we are born again ;—when in addition to such a travail of the soul, we find ourselves in new and mysterious, but most intimate relationship with “ the new man, who after God is created in righteousness and true holiness ? ” Those who are incredulous as to the inward testimony of faith, and require in their own case, other proof that they are alive in Christ, are for the most part, it is to be feared, as yet “ dead in sin, and the uncircumcision of their flesh.” Were they really alive, they could require no evidence of the fact, beyond the fact itself. So clear, so unequivocal, so certain beyond all doubt or shadow of a doubt, is the statement of our Lord, that, “ Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” or enter therein ; and so undeniable the inference, that if a man can both see that glorious kingdom, and has by faith entered therein, he is assuredly born of the Spirit ; regeneration by the Spirit in every case preceding that vision of faith which is afterwards the seal of its reality. (John i. 12, 13.)

That experimental view of faith in its internal working in the soul, which is depicted in the first verse of this epistle, is also completely opposed to those false pretensions to the possession of faith, which some confidently urge, on the ground that they believe the scripture record, which testifies, that it is faith alone that justifies and saves. And such persons reason thus : Faith is belief ; nothing more. We believe ; therefore we have faith. Christ, and in him eternal life, is the possession of those that believe. We believe, consequently Christ is ours, and with him eternal life. And so, by means of this species of false logic, the wished-for conclusion is attained : namely, that these reasoners have faith ; whereas, they have not the scriptural faith

of God's elect. Their's is not the "faith of the operation of God;" not a divine and supernatural gift; but as they themselves attest, *mere belief*. In their case there has been no hearing, seeing with their eyes, looking on, and handling with their hands, the Word of Life. To these experiences they are strangers. But the faith of mere belief, is the faith of the natural man, dead in sin. Witness the case of Simon Magus in the Acts of the Apostles, *who believed*, and was in consequence baptized, but who was presently after declared by the apostle Peter, to be "in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity." (Acts viii. 13, &c.) The possessors of the faith of mere belief, when called upon to give a reason of the hope that is in them, cannot go beyond the statement, that they "believe." They cannot define what saving faith is, from an experience of its operation and effects in their own hearts: for they are without the living principle of faith. They cannot attest, that whereas they were deaf, now they hear; that whereas they were blind, now they see. Much less can they testify, that they have so looked on him whom their sins have pierced, as to have obtained, through that look, eternal remission of their sins. Above all, they cannot say, that they have had power with the Angel of the Covenant, and through him, with much weeping and supplication, have prevailed with God. (Hosea xii. 3, 4.) The faith of mere belief is of the flesh, and must therefore of necessity be allied to corruption. And hence it is, that we find this faith for the most part linked with false, speculative doctrines, or licentious practice, proving the truth of the testimony, that "a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit."

The interpretation of the first verse of this epistle, as being aptly expressive of an experimental and spiritual

knowledge of Christ by faith, and that "in the inner man," does not preclude the more obvious and literal interpretation of the apostle's words, should we desire to take them also in the letter, and to consider them as expressive, as indeed they are, of an actual and personal acquaintance with Christ in the flesh. The apostle John was one of the chosen eye-witnesses of the fact of the incarnation of the Eternal Word. Also of the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord, and of all the other events connected with his personal ministry on earth. But the circumstance of the personal acquaintance of the apostles with the Lord Jesus, which it is of great importance to substantiate and dwell upon, in those works which treat professedly of the *external* evidence of our faith, will now be passed over, as in this commentary, the object is rather to examine the interior of the Christian edifice. Without are strong holds, worthy of our scrutiny, as well as of our confidence; and we have reason to be thankful to those who point out to us the solid foundations of the outer bulwarks. But it is within our Zion that the king holds his court. It is there that he dispenses all his royal gifts; and too many are satisfied with viewing the outer fortifications of the city. They do not penetrate into the citadel. They are contented to remain without, unmindful of the connexion of such a position with a fearful future doom. The same evangelist who penned this epistle, has in another portion of Scripture described to us the persons who are "Without," and for ever excluded from "the heavenly city." (Rev. xxii. 15.) They are those who remain in their sins, and the uncircumcision of their flesh. They are those, who will not be persuaded to ask the anointed Jesus to bestow on them the faith of his elect.

1. *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life,*
2. *(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)*

Now, it is this king, as the special object of the believer's faith, that the apostle John presents to us, under various names and forms of speech. First, he speaks of the Lord Jesus as "That which was from the beginning." Then, as "the word of life." Afterwards, he calls him simply "the life." Again, "that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." Let us endeavour to consider the meaning of these different epithets, and to discover their fitness as descriptive of him who is "the author and finisher of our faith;" the "Alpha and Omega:" "the first and the last;" "the beginning and the ending;" "the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."

The apostle John, as was before observed, at once points in the opening of this epistle, as in the commencement of his Gospel, to the true and proper deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we may add, as worthy of notice, that in the beginning of that last book of Scripture, which is entitled, "the Revelation of St. John," the Lord Jesus, who is described as the speaker, attests that of himself which his apostle had previously announced by a divine inspiration. Again and again does "the true and faithful witness" declare the all-important fact of his own godhead. We are not there-

fore left in any doubt as to the real meaning of the expression, "*That which was from the beginning,*" for we find it explained by our Lord's testimony, (Rev. i. 8,)—"I am Alpha, the *beginning.*" But who is the beginning, save he who is also "the ending," as we read in the same verse? And who is both "the beginning and the ending," save God only, "*The Almighty, which is, and was, and is to come?*" Then Jesus is "*The Almighty,*" for he is the speaker; and we must therefore believe him to be very and true God, and equal with the Father, of whose "eternal power and Godhead," we can say no more than the Lord Jesus affirms of himself, viz. that he is "*Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the ending, the Almighty, which is, and which was, and which is to come.*"

If we compare with the text just quoted, Isa. xli. 4 : xliii. 10 : xlv. 6 : and xlviii. 12, we shall find Jehovah proclaiming his godhead by a use of the same terms, which the apostle John applies to the Lord Jesus, and which the Lord applies to himself, when no less than six different times he is the speaker, and affirms himself to be God, "without beginning of days or end of life." In the fourth verse of the forty-first chapter of Isaiah, we have a striking parallel for the expression, "*That which was from the beginning.*" The prophet's words are these; (but it is Jehovah who asks the question); "who hath wrought *from the beginning?*" and then the answer follows; "I Jehovah, the first, and with the last, I am he." And that the expression "*from the beginning,*" is equivalent to an eternal duration, we find also distinctly proved in Prov. viii. 23, for there we read *from everlasting, from the beginning.* The two expressions are so linked together, that it is evident they mean one and the same thing.

The fact of the true deity of the Lord Jesus, being established by the expression, "*that which was from the beginning,*" our apostle proceeds to give us more exact descriptions of the glorious person of our Emmanuel. And he calls him "*The Word of Life.*" In the opening of his gospel, John announced him simply as "the Word." Here he is more explicit. For "the word" signifies only a manifestation of deity; "the word of life," a peculiar manifestation of that deity; even a *putting forth* of that *principle of life* which is essential to the godhead. The apostle in his gospel also informs us afterwards, concerning "the word," that *in him* was life. ver. 4. But here he places before us at once the fact, that Christ did not only possess life *in himself*, but was *the manifestation* of life, even of that eternal life, which from the beginning he possessed, as God, and *with* God. (see John i. 1, 2, and this epistle, ver. 2. where the apostle speaks of "*that eternal life which was with the Father.*") Let us pause for a moment, amidst the sublime and in some respects abstruse views, which the apostle presents us with, in connexion with the person of the Lord Jesus, and inquire why he sets them before us. Now his intention is this: he would have us understand the nature of our salvation by Christ; and this cannot be effected whilst we remain in ignorance of the person and nature of our incarnate God. We acknowledge Jesus to be a Saviour, and we profess ourselves satisfied in his fitness to accomplish the work of our redemption. And such general acknowledgments, and perception of his fitness, may suffice for those whose faith is merely external and nominal; but let the conscience be convinced of sin by the Holy Ghost, and let the wrath of God against sin be revealed to the troubled spirit, then the inquiry will be, has God indeed "laid

help upon one that is *mighty*," and "is Jesus *able* to save to *the uttermost* all who come unto God by him?" 'Surely,' says the trembling sinner, 'no other than a God could bear the weight of the world's sin; no other than God could bear the wrath of God, taking vengeance for iniquity. Satisfy me that Jesus could sustain the burden of man's guilt, or I dare not trust him with my soul. I dare not confide it to any, save to its Creator. In my redemption and salvation, the attributes of Deity must be displayed. No creature, however excellent or glorious, can impart life to my dead soul: it is only "the Prince of Life" who can do this!'

In vain do the carnally-minded object, that belief in the deity of Christ is rather speculative than practical. The believer can attest that it is not so. He is in quest of life, of life eternal; and is it to him a mere speculative matter, when the Scripture unfolds to him, that Christ is life, eternal life, and that this Christ is the believer's portion? To the ignorant and careless, those researches are unimportant, which the Scripture presents as most important. And with the ignorant and careless we must class all those persons, however they may be morally and intellectually endowed, who remain unconscious of the fact of their ruin in Adam, and recovery in Christ. To such as these, the Lord Jesus has "neither form nor comeliness that he should be desired"—at least, he has no merit beyond that of the philosophic teacher, who frames a new and approved system of ethics. But with believers it is far otherwise. They find themselves, according to the testimony of the Scriptures, ruined, lost, undone,—also, they discover by the same word of truth, that sin, and the wrath of God in consequence of sin, has caused their destruction. And they cannot be persuaded that

their views are fictitious, and their alarm unfounded, *for they find that they have the sentence of death in themselves.* Now it is for the consolation of such convinced sinners that the apostle writes. He preaches to them "Jesus;" and proclaims him to be the deliverer, who having "Life in himself," quickeneth whom he will; at whose voice, the dead hear, and live; in whom believing, the dead soul is not only quickened to a new life, but to an everlasting life: for "the gift of God is *eternal life* through Jesus Christ our Lord." Do not let us forget the object of the beloved disciple in writing this epistle. He says to the church, "These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." And hence his promptitude in presenting to the faithful the person of Christ, as life; the word of life; life manifested; eternal life.

We may add, that amidst the variety of descriptive epithets applied in Scripture to the Lord Jesus, there are not any, more aptly significant of his work as well as person, than those just enumerated. We read, that "life and immortality are brought to light in the Gospel." That is, they are clearly manifested in the person of that Christ who is the sum and substance of the gospel. Jesus was the personification, if we may, so speak, of the principle of life. How do we behold him in his progress through this world of death, continually triumphing over that death, which at last he "abolished!" (2 Tim. i. 10.) And how did he destroy death? Even by his becoming obedient to the same. In this stupendous way "destroying him who had the power of death, and delivering them who through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." In virtue of his own eternal life, he rose again from death; "for it was not possible that he should be holden of it." (Acts ii. 24.) But why did he

thus *manifest* himself to be “ the Prince of life ? ” It was for the full assurance of his people’s faith and hope, that “ having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” It is for us that “ the life was manifested ; ” even “ that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.” And how deeply consolatory are the reflections which are suggested to the believing heart, in connexion with Christ’s assurance to his people ; “ Because I live, ye shall live also ; ” and with the words, “ I give unto my sheep eternal life.” Also with the apostle’s assertion, “ Our life is hid with Christ in God.” Believers do indeed esteem Christ to be their life ; they cling to the assurance that he is so. For they do not forget that he has said, “ I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

3. *That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us ; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

Should any persons be disposed, as too many are, to interpret the first verse of this epistle as merely expressive of an external knowledge of Christ after the flesh, they are convicted of error, by the further declaration of the apostle, in the verse now under consideration. Very many commentators, in expounding this portion of Scripture, do not get beyond the letter of the text. But how clearly are they refuted, and the spiritual exposition of the preceding pages vindicated, by the reason which John proceeds to assign for his

declaring that which he had seen and heard. "*That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us ; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*"

Now it is evident that something more is implied by the term "fellowship," than a mere participation of the apostle's complete knowledge of the personal history of Jesus ; for he defines this "fellowship" to have reference to "*the Father*" as well as to that Christ whom he had known in the flesh. The case appears to be this. The seeing, hearing, looking upon and handling of the Word of Life, had been productive in John's experience of a particular result, which he calls "*Fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*" And the Apostle says, he will declare to others that Christ, in and through whom he had been introduced into this fellowship, in order that they may be made partakers of the same. But John does not advert in this epistle to a single fact of Christ's personal history. He seems purposely to fix our attention at once upon *his essential nature as the life-giving God*. And in connexion with this clearly indicated purpose, we perceive at once what that "fellowship" is, to which he had attained. It is communion with the Son in his eternal life. A participation, as Peter expresses it, of the divine nature. Now it is plain, that no intimacy, however great, with the *Man* Jesus, could have issued in the possession of a divine and eternal life ; nor can a nominal Christianity, by any possibility, bestow upon us the fellowship intended by the apostle. It is the privilege of *faith alone* to introduce us into this happy state of communion with the Father and the Son. First, we have by faith, *union* with Christ, and then *communion* with him in his life. Union with the Lord

Jesus must in every case precede communion. We must be grafted into Christ by the divine husbandry of faith, and become branches of that living vine, before the sap and life-giving juice of the root and parent tree can extend to us. And supposing such an insertion into the true Vine to have taken place, (which is first of all ascertained to our own soul, by the very fact of the operation of our engrafting therein,) then the blessed fruit is fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. A participation in Christ of a principle of divine and never-ending life; which life, as it is the life of God, and therefore the life of the Father as well as of the Son, we are said to receive from the Father as well as from his Son Jesus Christ. Nor can we separate the Father and the Son; for Christ has said, "I and my Father are one."

The Apostle having confined himself in the opening of this Epistle to the designation of the Lord Jesus as "Life, eternal life," "the Word of Life," and the life "*manifested unto us*," the word "fellowship" has been interpreted, in connexion with those previous epithets and titles of Christ, to signify a communion with the Lord Jesus in *his life*. But as in very many places of Scripture Christ is set forth to us in other characters, such as the "Wisdom of God, and the Power of God," so in this participation of the life of the Son of God, there will also be communion with him in his wisdom and his power. Indeed, as our Apostle tells us in his Gospel, "out of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." With the life of Christ all the attributes of that life must be concomitant. So if we are partakers of that life, we derive from the fulness of that life, "grace to help in every time of need." Not that we so possess life in ourselves, after we have received

the gift of life in Jesus, that we are to draw upon that fountain of life, as though it were an independent possession of our own. Far from it. Christ within us, to whom we are united by faith, is the never-failing spring of our new life in him. Could we after believing be again separated from "Christ who is our life," then should we cease to live, we should return again to our former state of death. But now being alive in him, and so linked with him by a true faith, that death has no more dominion over us, we enjoy communion with the Lord in all his attributes of power, wisdom, holiness, and righteousness. When we have subscribed with heart as well as hand to the God of Jacob, then we are able to say, "in the Lord have I righteousness and strength;" and again with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me." Our folly is enlightened by his wisdom; and our want of holiness supplied by that "Christ, who of God is made unto us, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

"That ye also may have fellowship with us." These words give sweet evidence of the state of the writer's heart. "Love unfeigned" appears to have taken full possession of that breast which once could harbour hard and unkind feelings. (Mark ix. 38, 39, and Luke ix. 51, 55.) That same John, who was reprov'd by his divine Master, both for narrowness of sentiment, and also for mistaking the object of the Gospel mission, now appears before us with one prevailing and absorbing feeling. He would have others share in his own happy fellowship with Jesus; in his own sacred and blessed communion with the Father. He would have the pale of the true church enlarged by the conscious possession of a lively faith in Christ. To Zion he says with the

prophet of old, "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations; spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes." We can no longer discover any trace of that exclusive spirit which once incurred the Lord's mild disapproval; much less of that fierce zeal which provoked a more severe rebuke. His desire is now, that others may know Jesus as he knows him; that others may love him as he loves him; above all, that others may be assured that they also share in that love of the Father and the Son which he himself enjoyed; that others may know and believe that by faith all are partakers of the same rich covenant gift of grace and love.

4. *And these things write we unto you that your joy may be full.*

These words, as before observed, may be considered a key to the right understanding of this Epistle. And who is at liberty to doubt the Apostle's intention when he states it so distinctly? Many commentators however have ventured to tell us, that John wrote this portion of Scripture to refute certain heresies that had already appeared in the church, and they entirely overlook the object which he himself avows. With these expositors the consolation and full joy of the elect is a very trifling matter, and they give us their human learning instead of the sincere milk of the word. The little children in the faith care very little to be informed about the fantastic notions of the Docetæ; nor are they better pleased with disputations on the opinions of the Ebionites and Cerinthians. Their souls hunger for the bread of life, and their thirsting spirits long to be

refreshed with water from the wells of salvation. There is indeed a great propriety in the labours of the learned, when they fully investigate every period of church history, and depict in true colours the varied corruptions both doctrinal and practical, which in every age have impaired the strength and beauty of the professing church. It is well to know her deformities in the time past, that we may guard against their recurrence (although under new forms) in the present and the future. Still, with these concessions, and with a true sense of obligation to those really learned men who have made the investigation of church history their peculiar study, the believer must protest against *that misapplication of their labours* which certainly takes place, *when instead of bread, stones are presented him, for the nourishment of his immortal soul.* But we cannot be surprised that the false teachers in the church who are themselves ignorant of the doctrine of faith and salvation, should present their readers and hearers with the only sort of knowledge they possess. An acquaintance with heretical opinions, and it may be with orthodox opinions, is easily acquired and as easily displayed. The natural man is sufficient for this sort of ministerial work, if it can be called by such a name. Meantime the children remain unfed. They "desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby." They know that "in their Father's house there is bread enough and to spare." But, alas! they are often constrained to feed upon the husks, which the swine eat. "No man giveth unto them." And whence is this? Are there no pastors in the church to fill the people of the Lord with knowledge and understanding? Are there not any teachers for the edifying of the body of Christ? The Lord's name be praised, *there are.* But they are few in

number : and it behoves the faithful to pray to the Lord of the harvest that he would “ send forth more labourers into his harvest.”

5. *This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and that in him is no darkness at all.*

With what great propriety does this verse succeed to the preceding one ! For what announcement can we imagine more conducive to a full joy than this, “ *that God is light, and that in him there is no darkness at all.*” And this information comes to the church in the form of “ *a message heard of him.*” The gracious friend who sends the message is easily recognized ; “ It is the Lord.” And he who conveyed the message to John was the Spirit of the Father and the Son, the Holy Ghost, the third person in the ever-adorable Trinity in Unity. Here then we have a communication respecting God the Father, made to us from God the Son, by God the Holy Ghost. And surely we must confess the message to be such as bespeaks at once the hand that brings it. It can be no other than that of the Comforter. We recognize his office and his work. Oh blessed revelation, and most consolatory truth ! “ *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*” And the same Divine instructor has informed us by another Apostle, (James) that “ God is the Father of lights, and that with him is no variable-ness nor shadow of turning,” and also, that “ this God is our God, even for ever,” unto death, and beyond death ; for “ when flesh and heart fail, God is the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever.”

The message that “ *God is light, and that in him is no*

darkness at all," at once lets in a flood of light into our dark hearts, which are too apt to misgive under the apprehension that there is some darkness in our God. Those difficulties which continually present themselves to the carnal mind, when it begins to reason concerning the revealed mind and will of God, do also in a measure force themselves upon the consideration of those who pray that "all imaginations may be cast down, and that every thought may be brought into subjection to the obedience of Christ." Natural reason is not so entirely dethroned in the hearts of the faithful, as they desire it should be. Nor does faith rule so perfectly as they could wish. How many vain reasonings retard the growth of the knowledge of Christ in the minds of his people! What questionings and disputings do they oftentimes carry on in their own souls, concerning God and his ways. Sometimes his providential dispensations are more than inscrutable; they are displeasing. And how does the spirit rebel against the dispensations of his grace! Again and again, indwelling sin, wrought upon by the temptations and suggestions of the wicked one, provokes the impious question, "are not his ways crooked?" and "is there not unrighteousness with God?" "Who hath resisted his will?" And, "why doth he yet find fault?" Now here is a standard provided by the Spirit of the Lord, which we are to lift up against the enemy, when he comes in as a flood, with innumerable hard thoughts of the blessed God, and his ways. "*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*" Let reason affirm the contrary, as assuredly it will; here is the answer. Let Satan suggest his many blasphemies against God, our reply is at hand; and with this sword of the Spirit, with this word of God, the father of lies shall be discomfited: "*God is light.*" But the reason

why we assign darkness to our God is this ; that " he dwells in the light which no man can approach unto." His light is too bright to admit of any mortal's gaze. We see but a little part of his ways ; the vast whole cannot be taken in by our feeble vision. Still we attempt to fathom the bottomless abyss of his counsels, and even wonder that we do not succeed. So great is the folly that still cleaves to us ; so prodigious our presumption and remaining ignorance ! But " the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation " pities us as a father does his children, and he is well pleased that we should receive a message, assuring us that "*He is light, and that in him is no darkness at all.*" Now this blessed truth is a haven of rest to the troubled spirit. Our tempest-tossed barks enter therein, and find repose. Our scrutiny of God's equity ends here. We say to our souls, " Let God be true and every man a liar." " He will assuredly be justified in his sayings, and overcome when he is judged." The conviction that there is no darkness in him, gives the peace that passeth all understanding of the natural man. "*God is light,*" and " this name of the Lord," this declaration of his nature, " is a strong tower, into which the righteous flee and are safe."

By the name "*God,*" in the verse now under consideration, it is probable that the apostle designates in a peculiar manner *the Father*. And as it is to the Father that the Scripture refers all decrees in the eternal counsels, even as to the Son and Holy Ghost are assigned the execution of such decrees and counsels, so it is of peculiar importance that we judge rightly of the nature and attributes of that Almighty and glorious potentate, " the King, eternal, immortal, invisible," concerning whom we read, " to us there is one God, the Father."

Not that our apprehensions are correct, if we refer all eternal decrees to the Father, as though the Son and Spirit had no part therein, for the persons of the god-head being one in essence, are also one in mind and purpose. But the Scripture, as before observed, pointing out the Father as the divine originator of all the decrees and counsels which affect the government of the world and human race, (although not without the co-operation and joint counsel of the Son and Spirit,) it is highly necessary that we should entertain a clear and fixed assurance of the perfect equity of our God, as also of his unerring wisdom, and unimpeachable goodness. In regard to the blessed Jesus, there is in some minds, through ignorance, a more perfect confidence, that He is light, than that the Father is light. When Jesus proclaims himself the Light of the world, and at the same time appears invested with all the attributes of the tenderest human sympathy, some will acknowledge that *his* benignity demands their confidence, while at the same time their minds misgive, as it regards the Father's love, when they discover that none shall attain to the kingdom of the Son, save those who have been assigned him by the Father, from before the foundation of the world. But with too many, the error is pride of heart, rather than a timid misapprehension of the truth, and such persons are so hardy as to affirm, that if certain statements of the Scripture are to be interpreted according to the obvious meaning of the words, then is there darkness in God. Still, the Scripture cannot be broken, and the gracious message remains upon record for the consolation of the church: "*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*" And is it conceivable that we should be wiser than God, and that our light should exceed his light? But when we begin to measure his

light by our own, what is this but to say, we have the capacity for so doing? All will acknowledge in words, the folly of dealing thus with the great God. It would indeed seem to be an infatuation that could not possibly possess any rational mind. The blindness appears too gross, too monstrous. And yet this is a blindness proper to man, and even believers are partly affected by it. Certainly they are liable to it, as they often perceive and confess to their shame and grief. But how shall we enough admire the goodness that prompted the apostle's message? It is not accompanied by any upbraiding. There is no reproof of our remaining unbelief and foolish proneness to measure God's light by our darkness; his wisdom by our ignorance; and the vastness of his designs, by the littleness of our own. Far from it. The Lord bears with our folly; and for the full joy of our souls, he will have his servant declare to us the message "heard of him."

6. *If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.*

Some commentators have said that there is very little, if any, connexion observable, in the apostle's arrangement of truth in this epistle. That his statements, although highly important, are disjointed, and do not appear to succeed necessarily in the order in which he has placed them. And it must be granted, that if we look in this epistle for an unbroken demonstration of any one truth in the form of an argument, which shall be conclusive in its reasoning, from the logical accuracy with which every successive truth or inference is linked with the preceding one, we shall be disappointed.

Nevertheless, a *spiritual* connexion may have existed in the apostle's mind, as he expressed his sentiments; a connexion the less obvious, it may be, because spiritual. Indeed, we must admit, that this epistle is remarkably unintelligible to the natural understanding, on account of its deeply experimental nature, and because it goes far beyond that surface of truth, which the natural man can in a measure apprehend. But by continually bearing in mind the specific object for which the apostle wrote this epistle, it may help us to discover a considerable degree of connexion not otherwise apparent in its several parts. Now the apostle stated in ver. 4, that his communications were for the saints, in order that their joy might be full. But he knew that very many would receive his word with joy, who had no root in themselves; consequently that it was a matter of great importance to mark distinctly the difference that exists between the true and false professor. John had no mind to take "the children's bread, and give it unto dogs," nor would he cast his pearls before swine; therefore we find him as careful on the one hand, to detect hypocrisy, as he is zealous on the other, to build up the believer in his most holy faith. His beautiful and consolatory addresses to believers are interwoven with sharp animadversions upon unsound professors. And for this reason, that their hypocrisy being discovered to themselves, "the Lord peradventure might grant them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." But also for the sake of believers, who are in danger of being imposed upon by the fictitious faith of "false brethren, crept in unawares." Now in regard to the primary object of the apostle,—that of promoting to the utmost of his power the full joy of believers, we cannot imagine a more perfect execution of his intention, than the plan

he adopts of presenting to the church in rich succession one glorious and consolatory truth after another, each one of them being of vital and infinite importance. Already in the compass of a few short verses, the person of the Lord Jesus has been presented by our apostle as "the life of men." He has emphatically told us that this Christ was his, and that He is manifested unto us. Also, he has proclaimed to us the surprising fact, that "a sinner can have fellowship with the Father and the Son." That he had attained this fellowship, and that the same is free to us also. Then he added, lest we should doubt the Father's willingness to receive all suplicants, that God is light, and that there is no darkness in him. But in ver. 5, the apostle commences his warfare against false professors. "There is no peace, saith our God, for the wicked." And all are wicked, (according to the Scripture,) who are destitute of faith. The apostle proceeds to describe such nominal Christians. *They say* that they have fellowship with God, but they walk in darkness, *i. e.* have no spiritual perception of divine truth; consequently they lie, and do not the truth.

Now this description embraces every variety of nominal Christianity, and therefore the application of the apostle's words is of vast extent. All the classes of unregenerate persons, into which the professing church is divided, however dissimilar in some respects, are alike in this, that they make an unsound profession of faith, and therefore "lie, and do not the truth." Certainly the apostle's description includes all adult persons who are Christians by name only, and the baptismal washing of water, and who have not as yet been made partakers of "the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

We must believe concerning all such Christians as have only an external communion with the faithful, in the ordinances of worship, in sacraments, and the rites of the church, that they "*walk in darkness*;" also that they are amongst those whom the scripture describes as "sitting in darkness and the shadow of death." For "God who at the first commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has not yet shined into their hearts, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." And hence it is that they walk in darkness. They are not yet the subjects of regenerating grace, but are amongst those "whom the god of this world hath blinded, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Moreover, these nominal Christians are deceived by that uncertain light that glimmers around them. For their inward darkness and blindness exists in connexion with a certain degree, and outward manifestation, of a portion at least of the light of God's truth. They have been baptized, and they imagine that they are therefore regenerate, and made partakers of that birth from above, without which no man can see, or enter into the kingdom of God. They believe in the facts of the personal history of the Lord Jesus, and as they imagine, in the doctrines also of Christianity. But alas! they have no faith, no faith which is of the operation of God. For the new-birth must precede faith, and they are not yet born of the Spirit. They must therefore be walking in the natural darkness of their minds, and if they say they have fellowship with God, "*they lie, and do not the truth*." They have no respect to the truth, but have "a lie in their right hand." The fact of their walking in darkness utterly invalidates their pretence of fellowship with

God. "For how," says the scripture, "can two walk together except they be agreed?" How enjoy fellowship with God, except we be first reconciled to him, by a living faith in Christ? Now this faith is wanting, for regeneration is wanting; and we are alienated from the life of God, until by repentance and faith we are again brought nigh to God through the death of his Son.

In regard to the external life and conversation of those unregenerate persons who are said to "*walk in darkness*," it may be either good or bad; righteous or unrighteous; moral or immoral. Such individuals may be wise, prudent, discreet, in the eyes of men, or they may be unwise, imprudent, and reckless as it regards the consequences of their actions. Unless we venture to contradict the scripture, we must admit that righteousness does not come by the law, and that "*whatsoever is not of faith is sin*." Consequently, that all who are destitute of faith walk in darkness, and do not the truth. The works of some may be better than the works of others, and their delinquencies far less flagrant; but if all are alike destitute of faith and the new-birth, then all alike walk in darkness; and if they say they have fellowship with God, "*they lie, and do not the truth*."—Some works of the unregenerate are not only specious, but in a certain sense good, because performed according to the command of God, and by a power derived from himself. They are good, because by them God works instrumentally in effecting his benevolent purposes. And such are all the actions which tend to the present peace and happiness of men. But this external righteousness is performed by many who "*do not the truth*" in the spiritual meaning of the term. They do not fulfil this righteousness, such as it is, by virtue of

faith in Christ; therefore, their works, good in themselves, and good for others, are not good to them, nor accepted with God. In their performance, they have no respect to *the truth*, and consequently they do it not. As for those nominal Christians who are openly profane, or careless in their lives, none find any difficulty in applying the apostle's words to them. All agree that they walk in darkness; that they "*do not the truth.*" Who can doubt, that those who are occupied in "*fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind,*" to the injury of themselves and others, must lie, if they say they have fellowship with God? Their deeds proclaim the fact. But that the religious, the devout, the orderly, the moral, the beneficent; that these too, should be walking in darkness,—at this, reason stumbles, and the carnal mind rebels. Nevertheless, in spite of this opposition of reason and nature, the apostle's description does most certainly embrace all unregenerate persons. All are included, who ignorant and unconscious of the fact of their natural blindness, have neglected to come to that Jesus, concerning whom we read: "*And I will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house.*" (Isaiah xlii. 6, 7.)

There is a class of persons whose condition appears to be in many respects dissimilar from the one just described, but of whom it must still be affirmed, that they have no real fellowship with God. Generally speaking, there is a distinct enmity perceptible in natural persons, against the declaration of "*the truth as it is in Jesus.*" Even whilst contending most vehemently for the externals of Christian faith and worship, their hostility to the peculiar doctrines of the gospel is most apparent.

How many do we find upholding our national Church establishment with the greatest zeal, who are not only ignorant of the real doctrines of the Church they profess to honour, but also altogether opposed to that vital godliness, which it is her great purpose to enforce.

As long as the ministry of the word is not "mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds," and all the vain imaginations of the carnal mind ; as long as it does not attempt to reduce men to the perfect obedience of Christ, all goes on well and smoothly. Men are content to be reminded of their duties both to God and man, provided only that the axe is not laid to the root of the tree. Provided that their "death in sin" is not discovered, men will even bear to be reminded that they are sinners. And they are not unwilling to hear that good works should be performed, except it be added, "that the tree must first be made good, in order that the fruit may be good also." But there is a class of persons, who can not only endure sound doctrine, but who prefer it to that which is false, who make affinity with the saints, and join themselves to the congregations of the faithful. And these are they which hear the word with joy, but as "yet have no root in themselves." The understanding of these persons has been partially enlightened, and convictions of spiritual truth have almost reached their hearts. The carnal enmity of the mind appears in a measure subdued, and the love of sin and of the world to be by no means obviously predominant. And towards such persons, the people of God exercise the "charity which believeth all things, and hopeth all things." They know that God only can try the heart and reins of the children of men, and that they are forbidden to attempt

the work of separating the tares from the wheat. Therefore they forbear all rash judgments, whilst at the same time they know from the testimony of Scripture, that a mixed multitude follows the camp of Israel. (Exod. xii. 37, 38.)

It is evident from an observation of facts, that in every congregation where the doctrine of faith and the new birth is preached, "with the demonstration of the Spirit and of power," that certain effects take place. By the grace of God accompanying the word delivered, some believe unto salvation. Some are converted, being made partakers of the "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." And these converted persons pass at once from the outer circle of the visible church, into the interior of the Christian temple, even within the vail, where Christ and his saints dwell. Others, on the contrary, being offended at the strange truth which meets their ears, relinquish their attendance on a ministry where "the gospel is preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." (1 Peter i. 12.) They are displeased, not only at the new matter proposed to them, but at the authority with which it is delivered. It appears intolerable to their pride, that any should assume a power to declare whose sins are remitted and whose sins are retained; and when their very righteousness is also denounced, as no better in the matter of justification, than "filthy rags," (Isa. lxiv. 6,) they withdraw from statements, which excite their unmixed abhorrence. They remain "dead in sin, and the uncircumcision of their flesh;" and go on in their career of nature, either sinning with the publicans and harlots, or performing works of external righteousness with the Scribes and Pharisees. But some adopt, as it were, a middle course.

And they are the class before alluded to. These are wrought upon by a power which may be termed that of moral and intellectual persuasion. The natural mind perceives a degree of truth and fitness in the things presented to it. Even reason acquiesces in some of the doctrines proposed. Other considerations may also interpose, which make the truth more acceptable than it would be, were it divested of such accompaniments. The preacher it may be, is an attractive person. He is unto some of the hearers "as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument;" (Ezek. xxxiii. 32.) Very many are the secondary causes, which make way for the amicable reception of the truth in particular cases. But still, in all such cases, where regeneration and faith are wanting, the internal path is one of darkness, let the external light be ever so great. There may be fellowship with the saints, but there is no fellowship with the Father and the Son. "He that followeth me," says Christ, "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." But how shall we follow Jesus except we keep his sayings? And what are these sayings? That we become converted and believe; that through the regeneration of our souls by grace, and by the faith which is God's gift, we follow Jesus, who is the light of the world, and that we walk in his light. But the reverse of all this is also true. Having no faith, nor birth from above, we do not follow Jesus. We may follow his saints, his ministers, his ordinances, his sacraments, but we cannot be said to follow himself in the regeneration. (Matt. xix. 28.) Therefore we have still to be "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son," before we are "made meet to be partakers

of the inheritance of the saints in light." (Col. i. 12, 13.)

Upon every view of the matter, those "walk in darkness," who have no inward saving experience of faith; and who cannot affirm truly that the Lord is their light and their salvation. It is a fatal error to rest satisfied with the hearing of the truth, and with the assimilation of ourselves in externals with the people of God. The word of God must be obeyed from the heart. There must be a belief to the saving of the soul. The gift of the new birth, and of faith, must be obtained as well as sought for, by urgent prayer to that God who has affirmed, that "every one that asketh receiveth;" that "he that seeks shall find; and that to him that knocketh it shall be opened." It is however a thought most agreeable to Christian charity, that some progress is perhaps made towards obtaining the grace of God, when individuals are providentially brought within the sound of the faithful preaching of the gospel, and submit themselves even in a degree to the truth delivered. There is great hope that ultimately the seed of the word may take root. The times and the seasons are in the Lord's hand; but it is good under such circumstances, "that we should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." (Lam. iii. 26.) Many prayers ascend to the throne of grace on the behalf of this mixed multitude who follow the camp of the Lord. Their ministers bear them on their hearts continually, and we know that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are," and he prevailed by prayer, so that "the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." (James v. 16, &c.) The sins of this people are not forgotten before God.

They are confessed and deplored, and for their cleansing the blood of the Lamb is continually pleaded. How many intreaties are offered to God for their dead souls ! How earnestly is he besought to visit them with the favour which he bears unto his people, and to dispense to them the felicities of his chosen ! Who shall not hope then, but that these supplications may prevail ? Who shall not believe that they are indited by that Spirit who searches the deep things of God ? to whom the names of God's elect are revealed, and for whom he causes supplication to be made, " according to the will of God, with groanings which cannot be uttered ? " But in the mean time, and till the prayer of faith is answered, the persons who are the subjects of this intercession, must still be admonished, that " if the light that is in them be darkness, how great is that darkness."

There is a case of "*walking in darkness*," which although not apparently contemplated by our apostle, may be referred to, in connexion with verse 6. And it is the case of those who seem to possess saving grace and faith, but who do not enjoy the light of God's countenance, nor the comfortable assurance of faith. The prophet Isaiah may refer to such a state when he says, " Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light ? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." But the New Testament is remarkably silent as to such an experience in the case of believers. To such its language continually is, " Ye *were* sometimes darkness, but *now* are ye light in the Lord." Certainly many persons appear to linger on the borders of the kingdom of light, and to stand for a long time without the heavenly Jerusalem, seeking

an entrance into this kingdom and city, but as yet finding none. And the prophet's words may be applicable to such persons. For they have faith to *fear the Lord, and they obey the voice of his servant*, by asking the way to Zion, by seeking to walk therein, and by knocking at the gates of the city for admittance. Then such persons, who may be said at present to walk in darkness, are directed to "trust in the name of the Lord," and their deliverance cannot be doubtful, because our Lord has said, "*every one* that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, *it shall be* opened." It certainly pleases God also, that some in the early stages of their conversion to himself, should realize in their own souls the import of what the scripture signifies by the term "*darkness.*" Persons under conviction of sin for the first time do most certainly walk in darkness. It may sometimes be said of such, that an horror of great darkness falls upon them; and that with the father of the faithful, they behold the smoking furnace, and the burning lamp of Jehovah's awful justice. (Gen. xv. 12—17.) The wrath of God against sin is revealed in their souls. They find themselves within the precincts of that mount Sinai of which it is written, that "if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart." (Heb. xii. 20.) They are come "unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest," (ver. 18.) and the broken law of God is in their ears as "the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words, which having heard, they intreat that the word should not be spoken to them any more." (ver. 19.) And who will deny that it is the prerogative of God alone to exchange this blackness and darkness of Sinai, for the healing light of his salvation? "For God," says the apostle "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath

shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Nevertheless, God works instrumentally by his word, as well as immediately by his Spirit, when he says to the soul, trembling under the darkness of the law of sin and death, " Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." (Isaiah lx. 1.) It is only God who can say to the inmost spirit of a man, " Fear not, I am thy salvation ;" but at the same time it is the all-important office of the ministry of reconciliation, to cry out unceasingly to such convinced souls, " Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope ;" " Behold thy king cometh unto thee : he is just and having salvation." (Zech. ix. 9, 12.)

The case of those who thus walk in darkness, under their first fearful convictions of sin and the wrath of God, does not often form a topic of discourse in the pulpit instructions of our teachers, except they have themselves passed through this initiatory stage of the life of faith. Spiritual sympathy is the result of Christian experience. We feel for those who are enduring all that we have ourselves felt. We understand their condition, and, if we have the bowels of mercies, and kindness, and charity proper to the elect of God, (Col. iii. 12.) we shall greatly desire to promote the peace and consolation of our afflicted brethren ; we shall do our utmost to bind up their wounds ; and if it be possible, we shall pour into them the oil and wine of gospel grace. Those teachers therefore are convicted, not only of spiritual obduracy and hardness of heart, but of gross ignorance ; who, regardless of the nature of their office, forbear " to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." Who refrain from ap-

pointing "to them that mourn in Zion, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified." (Isaiah lxi. 1—3.) Indeed we find too many of the watchmen in our Zion, ignorant of the pastor's office. To a certain degree, but in a very limited sense, they do perhaps "cry aloud and spare not." They do after a manner "shew the people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins." They sound, what they consider, an alarm. They speak of open and known sin as obnoxious to the wrath of God; and they exhort to the putting away of all such sin. Perhaps they may say also, that faith, added to the putting away of sin, is necessary to salvation. But concerning *the law*, nothing is said by these blind guides, except it be that they enjoin its observance; in part at least, on peril of eternal damnation. These teachers know not what it is to be "shut up under the law," as in a fortress of impregnable strength. They have never been in this prison-house themselves, nor do they feel for those who are immured in its dark chambers. The law in its terrible power and might, and most fearful character of the avenger of blood, (Numb. xxxv.) has never knocked at the door of their hearts. They have not been slain by the law; (Rom. vii. 10,) nor do they pity those who have. The security their own souls have always enjoyed, has prevented the necessity of their fleeing in their own case to those cities of refuge of which the scripture speaks. And they are not able, nor are they anxious, to direct poor trembling sinners to "a city of habitation." To such pastors the prophet Ezekiel speaks distinctly in the thirty-fourth chapter of his prophecy. He says, "the diseased have ye

not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost ; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them." It is a happy thing for such afflicted souls as walk in darkness, and receive no light from the faithful care of their appointed ministers, that the Lord has himself engaged to deliver such. After reproving the misconduct and negligence of the shepherds of his people, we find this consolatory promise, " Thus saith the Lord God ; behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep and find them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." " I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick."

There is another case of walking in darkness, which is dissimilar from that just described. The experience that has been already portrayed, is that of a soul convinced of sin, condemned by the law, and unable as yet to lay hold on the covenant of grace with a steady faith. But there are those who say that they walk in darkness, after they have become " light in the Lord." They doubt, it may be, of the reality of their own faith, although they were once assured that they had received the faith of God's elect. They fall again, perhaps, under the power of the law, so that they are possessed with " the spirit of bondage unto fear," instead of " standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free." And these circumstances may be indicated by

the prophet Micah, when he says, " Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy ; when I fall I shall arise ; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me." David also may refer to the same spiritual condition, when he says, " Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." But when we speak of the believer, as " light in the Lord," which most assuredly he is, and also, of his walking in darkness, there appears to be a manifest contradiction. And it would seem from the passages quoted from Micah and the Psalms, that amidst the darkness adverted to, the light of faith is still supposed to exist. Indeed it burns brightly in the beautiful apostrophe of the prophet. And there cannot, we are well assured, be any thing more than a partial eclipse of the believer's faith, even when he seems to himself to walk in darkness. Probably this sort of darkness, although not distinctly specified in the New Testament, is included amongst the sins and temptations into which it is always supposed the believer may fall, whilst he is " wrestling, not with flesh and blood, but against powers, against principalities, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." By the multiplied devices of Satan, and through the remaining power of indwelling corruption, the glorious light of the gospel of Christ may be for a season obscured in the believer's heart. Unbelief for a moment indulged, may bring a cloud over the believer's mind ; but faith, which is perennial in the soul, springs up anew, and chases away the darkening shadows. The apostle Peter refers in his first epistle, to that painful experience of the believer, which he terms the " being in heaviness through manifold temptations." This " heaviness " may possibly express much the same thing that be-

lievers intend, when they speak of walking in darkness. But it is certainly worthy of observation, that no such state as that of "walking in darkness," is distinctly indicated in the New Testament, as one common or proper to believers. Far from it. The command is universal and binding upon all; "Rejoice in the Lord alway." "Rejoice in the Lord, and again I say rejoice." And such a state of darkness is evidently opposed, by the exhortation, "Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward." Our confidence in God our Saviour is constantly to be maintained. It must be guarded as a sacred treasure. No quarter must be given to that enemy who would rob us of our joy in the Lord. However specious the pretence may be for the believer's continuing to walk in darkness, there is no scriptural ground for his doing so, but every reason for the contrary. Has he been "overtaken with a fault," which conscience condemns, and on account of which he is justly humbled before his God? "If any man (any believer) sin, he has an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins." "Being justified by faith," says the apostle, "we have peace with God; and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." No scriptural reason can be assigned why a justified person should walk in darkness. Nor does it appear agreeable to the tenor of the doctrine of the New Testament, that he should do so. The saints are continually admonished to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." And such a progressive increase of the knowledge of Christ, must be productive of a continually increasing light.

But probably in very many cases, when believers

walk in darkness, this arises from a morbid state of the animal spirits, or from positive physical disease. For we know that bodily disease does in a variety of ways impair the functions of the mind, so that it becomes incapable of forming right judgments, and may imagine to itself innumerable distortions of the truth. The Scripture does not appear to bear upon such cases; except that in general, it commends us in all exigencies and upon all occasions to have recourse to the Great Physician of body, soul, and spirit, "who knows whereof we are made, and who remembers that we are dust." We cannot err however in maintaining, that although the inward witness of faith may appear to be impaired by disease, and the mind to be clouded as to its own evidence of saving grace, faith in the believer's heart is an indestructible principle, and its light can never be extinguished. The inward witness of faith may be obscured. It may appear altogether lost. But before whose eyes is it darkened? Not before those eyes which are as a flame of fire, whose glance pierces to the thoughts and intents of the heart. That is impossible. "The foundation of God standeth sure, for the Lord knoweth them that are his." Does God forget that such an one has faith? That to such a person, at such a time, he imparted faith, precious faith, the faith which is of the operation of his Spirit, the faith of his elect? Is it obliterated from the mind of God, that at such and such a season, the person whom he had endowed with faith, laid hold on the covenant of grace, even on that Jesus, who is himself the Covenant provided by the Father? (Isa. xlii. 6, 7.) And if a citizen of Zion says, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me;" has not our God already replied to that sorrowful complaint? "Can a

woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." Disease may have so impaired the functions of the natural mind, that Satan may appear to have gained the victory over a believer's faith. But that faith was long ago grounded on a rock which cannot be shaken, "And that rock is Christ:" "The same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." "All flesh is indeed as grass, and all the glory of men as the flower of grass: the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away." The external manifestation, therefore, of faith, as far as it is in man, and a part of his glory, may appear to fade and wither; but as this life of faith is in Christ, and in God, it cannot die. It was begotten in the heart of the believer, by that "incorruptible seed of the Word, which liveth and abideth for ever;" and it unites to Jesus, in whom its possessor has obtained an imperishable life. And ere long the day shall come, in which faith shall be no more required as the active principle which gives evidence to the soul of things unseen, for the realities themselves will soon be present. And with reference to such a period, and to the case also of believers now in darkness, the beautiful words of the prophet may be applied: "The sun (symbolical of faith) shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon (another emblem of faith) give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light; and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."

7. *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

The apostle now supposes the opposite of the case he had imagined in the preceding verse. There he affirms, that whosoever walks in darkness has no fellowship with God ; but here the contrary of that : and that if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with him ; and consequently, that our profession of faith is not a false one. In this case, we neither deceive others, nor are we ourselves deceived.

Now to “ *walk in the light, as he is in the light,*” is so to walk in the light of the gospel of Christ, as to possess the knowledge of the truth in the way of an external revelation of God’s will, conjoined with an internal manifestation of the same. The light of gospel truth may shine on our path, but if the internal light of faith be wanting, spiritual and eternal objects will not be discerned. In order to “ *walk in the light as he is in the light,*” i. e. so as to see God in this light, there must be faith to see him, who but for this opened eye of the understanding will still remain invisible. The expression “ *as he is in the light*” is very significant. And it appears to limit the experience of walking in the light, to those who are by faith conscious of the fact, that God is reconciled to man in the person of his Son Jesus Christ. To discern God in the light of the gospel, is to see him as a reconciled Father, and to know ourselves to be his children by adoption and grace. And thus walking in the light of the gospel, and perceiving that God is well pleased with us in his Son, we have fellowship one with another, i. e. we maintain a blessed inter-

course of friendship with our God. Our heavenly Father has made over to us the unspeakable gift of his Son, and "with him also he freely gives us all things."

Our hearts, on the other hand, previously enlightened by his Spirit, and softened by his grace, return love for love. "We love Him because He first loved us." We begin to love him, when we know that he has so loved us. And in this way we have fellowship with God. We give him back a little portion of his own love, with which he has first warmed our hearts. We restore him a little measure of the honour, that he has first put upon us.

The expression, "*as He is in the light,*" evidently implies that there is such a thing as walking in a counterfeit light, *in which God is not, although he may appear to be therein.* And such is the light in which some of the zealous votaries of false religions have walked, and do still walk, in apparent devotion and heavenly contemplation. Enthusiastic fervours may appear to mark the worship of the heart; but if the light be of man's kindling, all who walk in this light, shall lie down in sorrow. (Isa. l. 10.) The light of the gospel reveals to us our God, in and through the person of a Mediator. Let God be contemplated out of Christ, and he is no longer the God whom the light of the gospel reveals. In that case we worship we know not what. We adore an idol which our own minds have formed.

The substance then of the apostle's declaration is this; that we have fellowship with God, when by faith we realize the truth that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing their trespasses unto them. For the light of the gospel reveals this truth, and it is applied to the believer's heart by the power of that faith which is of the operation of

God's spirit. But in the words "*as He is in the light,*" the pronoun need not be restricted to the person of God the Father. It may also be interpreted of Jesus, who is "*light of light,*" and without whom all our light is indeed darkness. And in that case the meaning is still much the same; for in the dispensation of the grace of the gospel, we find the divine persons of the Father and the Son in constant union, according to the statement of our Lord, "I and my Father are one." So that if we suppose Christ to be intended by the apostle, in him we also discern the Father, for Christ has said, "Who-soever has seen me, has seen the Father." And truly it is only through Christ, that we obtain fellowship with God. If Christ be not in the light, if he is not Himself our light, never shall the beams of the Father's glory irradiate our hearts. Therefore, if the emphatic pronoun "*He,*" in the present verse, be considered in connexion with its antecedent, and also with the general sense of the passage, to be properly restricted to the first person of the Trinity, still we cannot but see Jesus at the same time, inasmuch as "*he is the light of men,*" "*and the true light,*" whom if we follow, we shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. (John viii. 12.)

"*And the blood,*" &c. Our peace with God the Father being established in the person of our mediator and redeemer, who purchased that peace with the price of his own blood, we are now admitted into happy fellowship with God. No more "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenant of promise, and without God in the world," we are "brought nigh by the blood of Christ," and "in him we receive the atonement." Even now we are "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ," and by an express

declaration of the Scripture "all things are ours." The grant is made, and our God will not revoke it. "No good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly," i.e. from those who walk in the light, as Christ is in the light, justified by his grace, and making mention of his righteousness and of his only.

But our apostle would reassure our drooping faith as to the fact of our continuance in that happy fellowship into which our heavenly Father has admitted us. Our anxious hearts suggest, that although justified by faith, although forgiven all past offences for the name's sake of Jesus, we shall contract, and it may be, have already contracted since the first time of our believing, new offences, of a kind calculated to interrupt our fellowship with God, and to cause him to cast us from him in displeasure. Now in answer to such fears of humble, and in the main holy hearts, the apostle reveals to us, that "*the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.*" It has cleansed us already, and it will not cease to cleanse our souls. A continual process of purification is going on on our behalf. And this is indeed a truth calculated to rejoice our hearts; for here we perceive, that in spite of our new guilt, and fresh offences, we remain justified, and righteous in God's sight. We sin after justification, but the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from that sin. We contract fresh guilt. The blood of the Lamb still flows to wash away the guilty stain. And from whence is this grace, this continual remission? It would seem indicated as the *Father's* gift and counsel, by the insertion of the words "*his Son,*" in the sentence that reveals to us our state of privilege. "*And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin.*" Here we are reminded that the Son is the Father's gift; and that he is the Father's gift to a sin-

ful world, whom he so loved, as not to spare his own Son, but freely to give him up for us all. We cannot doubt then that the *continually cleansing efficacy* of the blood of Jesus, is a part of the *Father's* counsel in the plan of our redemption. And in connexion with our present subject, how naturally are we reminded that the sum and substance of gospel grace does indeed consist in "Redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." The importance also of the fact, that the believer's sin is continually remitted, and cleansed by the blood of Christ, will appear, if we consider that our fellowship with the Father could not possibly be maintained in any other way; but that by this means, of the Father's own appointing, it is established, and constantly ratified anew. If sin at any time remain on the believer's person, how can he be accepted in the sight of that holy God, "who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity?" "And how shall two walk together except they be agreed?" "Light and darkness have no communion;" nor can a sinner have fellowship with God, except in virtue of a constant remission of his sin. In the apostle's words, then, we have not only that result and effect set before us, which arises from walking in the light, and enjoying fellowship with God; but also the ground itself of that communion is disclosed to us. Truly, if we so walk in the light of the gospel, as to have in it a continual eye to the covenant of grace, the effect will be, that our sins shall be continually pardoned, and we shall remain always justified from all offences. And this is proved simply from the tenor of that word of God, which holds unceasingly the same language to every child of man; "look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." But besides this

provision of mercy, which is available for all who make use of it, (as indeed the believer does when he sins against God,) there is another provision made on the behalf of those who are justified by grace. And it is this : that sin is not at any time imputed to them. Not only does the believer again and again confess his newly contracted sin to God, and implore remission of the same,—and more than this, not only does he obtain the pardon he desires, through faith in the appointed sacrifice,—but also, even before the confession to God, and assurance to his own spirit, that his sin is pardoned, it is remitted, in virtue of the blood of that Jesus, “ who by one offering hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”

In a former verse, (3,) when speaking of his own fellowship with God, the apostle affirmed that this fellowship was “ with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” And the expression in the present verse, “ *we have fellowship one with another,*” does of necessity include, communion with the Son, as well as with the Father. Indeed we may add, that this fellowship exists between the believer and all the persons of the Trinity, and that when we speak at any time of communion with God, we cannot separate the persons of the godhead, so as to suppose that we can enjoy fellowship with one, and not with all. Our communion is at all times with God, Father, Son, and Spirit. And the origin of this fellowship is derived from the eternal love and electing grace of the Father, who in the foreknowledge of our defection and apostacy, decreed our restoration to himself through the gift, the unspeakable gift of his own Son. To this Son, as mediator, we owe our peaceful, happy intercourse with God our Father. “ He is our peace ; and he made peace for us by the blood of

his cross." To this blood also we are indebted, for that constant remission of offences, which secures the continuance of the peace, purchased for us at so vast a price. Lastly, we possess the inward witness of these facts, by the communion of the Holy Ghost, and without his aid we could not enjoy fellowship either with the Father or the Son. For it is "by the Holy Ghost given unto us, that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts." (Rom. v. 5.) Without the Spirit's teaching, we had remained ignorant of the great love with which our Father in heaven hath loved us. But for him no corresponding love had taken possession of our hearts. And he it is, who takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. He reveals to us "the things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive." And to this discovery he annexes the disclosure, that these things are ours. 'Tis he who witnesses with our spirits, that we are the children of God. He assures us of the fact of our adoption. He enables us to cry with the accent of faith, "Abba, Father." And in the course of our fellowship with God, it is the Spirit who maintains and carries it on, for he suggests every word and work by which we may serve God acceptably. We are ignorant, and although we have a loving Father, reconciled to us in his Son, "we know not what things to ask for as we ought." But the Spirit helps our infirmities. He teaches us to pray. He suggests our supplications. And how continually does he admonish us to walk worthy of our state of privilege! He brings all things to our remembrance, that Christ has spoken, or caused to be written for our guidance; and he applies the word to our hearts with a divine power. More than this, and above all, he communicates his own

divine nature to our souls. He maintains the life of Christ within us, by the indwelling of his own mighty power, and secures the continuance of that fellowship with the Father and the Son, which but for him would soon languish and decay.

It is of very great importance to the believer that he should clearly understand the nature of his reconciliation with God, for without this knowledge, his fellowship with the Father, as to his own enjoyment and consciousness of its existence, is liable to continual interruption. An abiding conviction of the Father's love should occupy our hearts, or the remaining enmity of our minds will not be subdued. For if we do not believe that God for Christ's sake has forgiven us all trespasses, we shall probably feel an instinctive hatred to that light by which our deeds may be reprov'd. But when we can realize the truth, that "God does not see iniquity in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel," so as to take vengeance of that sin which he has already transferred from guilty man to his surety Christ, then we take courage, and come to the light, and walk therein, in order that our deeds, our works of faith, may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. (John iii. 20, 21; and vi. 28, 29.) It is indeed a high attainment of faith to be persuaded at all times, that God is well pleased with us in his Son; and that when we discover in ourselves innumerable sins, we are not on that account to doubt of his favourable acceptance of our persons. But all turns upon this one point. Have we an eye to Jesus as the Mediator of the new covenant; and do we believe that he can save, and "will save to the uttermost, all who come unto God by him?" It is only in this full assurance of faith, "that we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." But being fully

convinced of the blessed truth, that where there is remission of sin no more offering is required on its account, (Heb. x. 18, 19, 22.) our souls enter into rest, the preparatory rest of faith, and become capable of enjoying fellowship with God. And then it is, that we come without the "fear that hath torment," into the presence of our thrice holy God. Then it is that we endure the searching glance of those eyes which are as a flame of fire, and pray to our God to "search us and try us, and see if there be any wicked way in us, that we may be led in the way everlasting." For why should we fear to approach the holy light and piercing eye of our God? Sinners indeed shall be consumed in his presence; but he is pleased to account us righteous. Our sins are in our own eyes as scarlet he tells us they are white as snow. They are as crimson; he pronounces them to be as wool. (Isaiah i. 18.) And shall we venture to dispute his word? Shall we not rather say, "Let God be true, and every man a liar?" Shall we not rather believe that our iniquities are blotted out, as he declares; and also, that they are covered with the garment provided by himself? The white raiment that he has put upon us, is the righteousness of saints; (Rev. xix. 7, 8.) but it is far more than this. It is "the righteousness of God," which is made ours by faith. This attire is such that earth only affords imperfect emblems of its purity and brightness. But encircled with these garments of salvation, with these robes of our Immanuel's righteousness, we venture into the august presence of our God, no longer afraid lest the shame of our nakedness should appear. (Rev. iii. 18.)

In the text under consideration, the apostle only says "*the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin,*" but we know from other parts of scripture,

that when iniquity is forgiven, and sin covered, righteousness is imputed, (Psalm xxxii. 1, 2. Rom. iv. 6—8.) and we do not therefore err in extending the signification of the apostle's words, and the blessing conveyed in them. The same garment that hides our sin from the eye of God, presents to him the perfect righteousness of his well-beloved Son. The first Adam, who is of the earth, earthy, being clothed upon with the Lord from heaven, "this corruptible" doth even now "put on incorruption," and "this mortal immortality." (1 Cor. xv. 53.)

8. *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

The apostle now breaks off from the consideration of the believer's happy state of privilege, to advert to the case of those, who whilst they make profession of a true faith, are altogether in the dark, as to the nature of that sin which still remains in the regenerate. Such persons are not conscious of any need of the continual operation of the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Jesus. They suppose that being delivered from the guilt of past offences, and justified, by what they imagine to be faith, the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness has already performed its office; and that now, it remains for them to do their part, by so fulfilling the law, as not to contract fresh guilt. They are perfecting holiness, as they think, in the fear of God, so that actual sin is not committed by them. Consequently, they do not perceive the necessity on their own part, of being continually washed anew in the blood of Christ.

Now, according to our apostle, such persons say virtually, that they have no sin, although it may be,

they do not expressly declare the same with their lips. And what does he affirm concerning such ignorant opposers of the truth of God's word? "They deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them." Others, except it be the grossly ignorant, they cannot deceive; but they impose upon themselves. The truly enlightened will not give credit to any pretensions to a sanctity which is unscriptural. They possess the charity "which hopeth all things, and believeth all things," but at the same time, they possess faith which brings all to the test of God's word, and there they learn, that there is no true righteousness save by imputation; that at all times we stand "accepted in the beloved;" and at no conceivable moment in ourselves, so as not to require an interest in "the blood of the everlasting covenant." It is indeed surprising that any should be able to practise such gross self-deception, as to imagine themselves without sin, when the whole tenour of scripture is against them. Every page of holy writ appears to refute their error. If not convicted by their own hearts, the perusal of the scripture must needs condemn them, were it not for the cause assigned by the apostle; "the truth is not in them." "The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," has not performed its work upon these ignorant professors. They have not found it "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and that it is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." "The thought of foolishness is sin." But who amongst the most holy of the saints, does not continually lament more of evil in himself than the mere *thought* of sin. Our thoughts condemn us, but our words and works condemn us also. Our transgressions

are more in number than the hairs of our head. For sin mingles in all we do. Even in the thoughts, and words, and works suggested by God's grace, and performed by the operation of his Spirit, we intermingle our own sin. And to say nothing of our wilful faults, which are so many and so grievous, how often do we err through ignorance! We sin unconsciously. But the circumstance of our ignorance does not wipe away our guilt. Far from it. An atonement is still necessary (Lev. iv. 2. and v. 15; Numb. xv. 22.) And in vain shall we attempt to discriminate as some pretend to do, between a temptation to commit sin, and the actual compliance with the temptation. The fact of our being tempted to transgress, convicts us of iniquity. For how are we tempted except there be in the heart an inbred lust exciting us to evil? By God's grace assisting and preventing us, the actual transgression is perhaps avoided. But what then? "the thought of foolishness is sin." Of God alone it is affirmed, that "he cannot be tempted with evil." And the reason why he cannot, is, because he is perfectly and immutably righteous. But all agree that man is *susceptible* of temptation to sin, after he is renewed by grace. He can be tempted with evil. And the scripture is explicit in defining the nature of sinful temptation. Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed (James i. 14.) And although by the power of grace the enticement is resisted and overcome, the fact of its conception in the heart proves the existence of sin there; of sin, which needs to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus, of sin, the same in kind, though not in degree, with all the more flagrant manifestations of the hateful principle.

9. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

The false experience described in the last verse, is now contrasted by our apostle, with the genuine experience of the saints. And of these, it is universally true, that they are convinced of sin. They also know that the confession of their sin is proper and necessary. So far from pretending that they are without sin, they make a frank and open confession of the same, both to God and man. To God always, at all times, and upon all occasions. To man also, unequivocally as far as the fact of the existence of sin is in question; but with reserve, as to its particular manifestations. The apostle seems to oppose this confession of sin, to the denial of its existence in the preceding verse. And as he affirms, that the sin of believers is remitted upon confession, we must infer, that the inverse of this is also true, and that sin is not remitted except it be confessed. The case then of those who suppose themselves to be without sin is deplorable, for their fancied immunity makes confession unnecessary, and without confession of sin there is no remission. Such persons must therefore bear the weight of their own iniquity.

“*He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” This is a most encouraging declaration for those who groan under a sense of their manifold sins, and remaining imperfections. Not only will God forgive sin upon confession, but he is pledged to do it by the perfections of his nature. His faithfulness is on our side, and his justice too. Here is comfort indeed for imperfect penitent believers. Not only does the mercy of God incline him

to pardon *the sinner*, his *justice* makes it necessary *that the believer* should be pardoned. The mercy and compassion of our God induced him to devise the means for our full absolution. Now his justice requires the execution of his merciful decrees. Not that we can suppose the Father backward to fulfil his own purpose of love ; but the apostle would confirm and strengthen our faith, by leading us to the immutable rock of God's eternal righteousness. For the convinced *sinner* cannot have a perfect confidence in the mercy of God, for this reason ; that although the scripture testifies abundantly concerning this attribute of deity, it also declares to us that God will by no means clear the guilty. Then, when we sin, we dare not trust to the mercy of God, although we make confession of our sin, for God has not pledged himself to forgive all sin, merely on confession, but on the contrary, has threatened to punish sin. And to what attribute of our God shall we appeal, if his mercy will not secure our pardon ? The scripture in the text before us, directs believers to look to the *faithfulness* and *justice* of God. Our God has pledged himself to remit the sins of all who come to him in the name of Jesus. And this is the strong hold of faith ; our faith has respect to God's faithfulness. It cannot be that our God should fail in any thing that he has promised : his truth makes this impossible ; but more than this, the very justice of God is on our side ; that awful attribute which we most fear, is now engaged on our behalf. And it is this which the apostle would teach us, for the full confirmation of our faith, and consolation of our hearts. God is *just* when he pardons *the believer's* sin. His justice requires that he should account none guilty who have laid hold upon the covenant of his grace. Jesus " was made sin for us that we might be made the

righteousness of God in him." The Father laid our iniquities on his Son. He visited those iniquities upon his person. Christ endured the punishment that was our due. And what remains? That the people for whom Christ suffered and died, should yet retain their own sins? Impossible. They were transferred to Jesus. They became his. Then they are no longer ours. Christ in his own person bore the penalty due to our transgressions. Then God will not reckon with us for a debt already paid. His justice forbids this;—but his love forbids it too. When the Lord Jesus pleads for his believing people, that he has satisfied for their sins even to the utmost farthing of the mighty debt, does the Father comply reluctantly with the demands of justice? Oh no! He is well-pleased to be reminded that the debt is paid. His glory is his goodness. (Exod. xxxiii. 19.) And this attribute of deity shines with resplendent brightness in the salvation of his apostate creature, man.

"And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Not only does the faithfulness of God secure the forgiveness of the believer's sin, it also secures his purification from all unrighteousness. For the promises of the new covenant of grace have respect to more than the covering of sin, and imputation of righteousness. Vast as these blessings are, they are linked with other covenanted mercies. An actual cleansing of the heart takes place in the case of the regenerate; and they are again and again renewed in the spirit of their minds by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. In virtue also of their new nature, which is maintained in life and vigour by the continual operation of the Spirit of Christ, they hate the garment spotted with the flesh, and cast it from them as a defiled thing. According to the tenor of the new covenant of grace, not only is sin remitted, but

a new nature is imparted to the believer. The heart of stone is removed by the mighty hand of God, which, at the same time dispenses the heart of flesh. The stubborn self-will of rebellious nature is subdued; and instead of this carnal enmity, the Spirit of the Lord vouchsafes the meek and humble dispositions of the little child. Nor does this work of grace take place only on the believer's first conversion to God. Then indeed he receives the gift of a new heart. But only as it were in embryo. The faculties and affections of the new man are to be developed more perfectly as the believer advances in the life of faith, for his sanctification is continually progressive. And this progressive sanctification takes place through the constant cleansing away of all his unrighteousness; his evangelical purification being productive of an actual holiness. For we err if we suppose that the cleansing of unrighteousness is merely privative, and effects no more than the absence of sin. This is far from being the case. When iniquity is purged, grace is imparted; (Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.) so that whenever the believer is cleansed from any unrighteousness of whatever kind, the new creature is made a partaker of the contrary grace. And the permitted manifestation of the remaining corruptions of the carnal mind, do in this way promote the growth of the new man, who receives all his lineaments of grace and righteousness, through the mortification and annihilation of those hateful deformities of sin which are the proper and essential characteristics of "the old man who is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." The believer in the ignorance of his heart may sometimes imagine that he has attained a considerable perfection in some Christian grace, to which in fact he has not attained. He will, however, discover his mistake, when the cor-

ruption of his nature in this particular is revealed to him. He will then perceive that his views of Christian holiness were very defective, and that the law of God is of greater extent than he imagined. Humiliation, self-abasement, and sorrow for sin will ensue. The Lord will also be entreated to put away the newly-discovered sin. But the believer will do more than desire pardon. He will earnestly plead with his God to give him the grace in which he has discovered himself to be deficient. The necessity of purification from any particular sin, always suggests to the believer that there is an equal necessity for his obtaining the spiritual grace which is the opposite of that sin; for these things cannot be separated in his mind. And it is in this way that the discovery, and subsequent confession and cleansing away of sin, is, in the believer's experience, connected with growth in grace.

Before passing on to the next verse, we may with propriety advert again to the prominence which the apostle gives to *the confession of sin* on the part of the believer, which confession he appears to make a condition, in order to our obtaining the pardon and cleansing away of sin. Now we know that sin is virtually pardoned before it is committed; for "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." The sins of the elect are therefore, properly speaking, forgiven, before they are confessed. Still, confession is absolutely necessary on many accounts. Without it, God is deprived of the honour and glory due to his holy name and nature. It is impossible to recognise aright, a single perfection of the godhead, except there be a confession of sin on the part of his guilty creatures. Except we know and feel that we are apostate rebels, utterly undeserving of the

least token of divine love and goodness, how shall we estimate aright the riches of that grace, which our God dispenses to his enemies ? And surely if we know and feel our sin, we must make confession of the same ; for if we do not, we basely dishonour God : we add insult to injury, for we make our God a liar. This the apostle shews in the next verse. But can the believer, who is convinced of sin by the Spirit, thus trifle with the blessed God ? Is not the disposition to confess sin, the first emotion of his contrite spirit ? And does not the same ingenuous willingness accompany him all through his pilgrimage ? It does. Nor can it be otherwise. The language of the believer's heart is this ; " My sin is ever before me." And he cannot keep this confession to himself. With the spirit of the returning prodigal, he must needs say to his justly-offended God, " Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son." Independently of the duty of confession, or any supposed advantage to be gained from it, there is on the part of the true penitent a real satisfaction in the act itself. To lie in the dust before God, making mention of our great sin and unworthiness, is, it may be, the only relief of which we are susceptible in the first view of our iniquity. But there is often a real relief in the confession of sin, and no doubt this takes place from the fitness of the thing itself.

The importance and duty of confessing sin, is also proved from the circumstance of our being convinced of sin, not only by conscience, and by the Spirit of God, but by the written word of God. And we should confess sin, not only that we may relieve our burdened hearts by that confession, but that God may be glorified in the truth of his word, and justified in all his sayings. He declares that we are sinners, and it becomes us to plead

guilty. There is no appeal from his decision. Even if conscience does not condemn, and the Spirit does not convince of sin, it behoves us to confess it, for "God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things."

There is also another reason why confession of sin is necessary. God requires that it should take place, and this is enough, even if no other cause of fitness could be assigned. If God wills that it should be so, shall we presume to question his appointment? But indeed, in whatever way we look at this matter of confession of sin, its importance, as well as obvious necessity is most apparent. For how can the believer, when convinced of sin, refrain from making confession to his God? Does not the very nature of prayer make confession necessary? We supplicate for mercy, for grace; but why? Is it not a sense of our ignorance, our sin, our misery, that stimulates our supplications, and makes them necessary? Assuredly it is. Then prayer is naturally and properly preceded by the confession of our varied wants and miseries and sins.

It is melancholy to think that the blessed portion of Scripture, now under consideration, is often despoiled of its real meaning, by the false glosses, and pretended explanations of ignorant teachers. How often do we find the trembling sinner reminded, that he must not only confess, *but also forsake* his sin, before he can hope to find mercy! Instead of proclaiming to the miserable prodigals, "This man receiveth *sinners*," (Luke xv. 2.) the heavy-laden souls are severely admonished to ease themselves of the burden of sin, before they come to Jesus. To confess, is not enough, say these blind guides; where is the proof of your *sincerity*? "Wash you, make you clean; cease to do evil; learn to do well; and bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance," that

your confession of sin may approve itself to be unfeigned. And such teachers and ignorant expounders of the law, like the scribes and pharisees, who in our Lord's time sat in Moses' seat, bind heavy burdens, and lay them on men's shoulders ; burdens which they would not so much as move with one of their fingers. How often is the heart of the believer stricken with one of Satan's arrows, from the bow and quiver of these false teachers ! But their word is the word of God ! The arrow was fetched from the armoury of the Scripture ! How then is it one of Satan's darts ? Do we not read that " he that confesseth *and forsaketh* his sins, shall find mercy ? " (Prov. xxviii. 13.) We do. But the same wise teacher who indited those words of truth, has also reminded us that " to every thing there is a season and a time ; that every thing is beautiful *in its season* ; " and that " a word spoken *in due season*, how good is it ? " We infer then, with the apostle Paul, that there is such a thing as " rightly dividing the word of truth ; " but that if this word even of truth be spoken at random by those " who know neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm, it may become the word of pestilential error " and will eat as doth a canker." That it does so but too often, the afflicted consciences of the saints can testify. No helping hand is stretched out to guide them to " one mighty to save." The poor sufferers are not told of the physician who is in Gilead, and of the sovereign balm that he dispenses. No. Other Scriptures, misapplied to their case, sound like a death-knell in their ears ; whilst Satan and their poor hearts suggest, " this is God's word, and we are lost for ever." But may we not fitly enquire, how shall any one sin be subdued after an evangelical manner, except the soul be first united to the Lord ? How shall any one sin be

forsaken, as God requires it should be, unless the grace of Christ be present in the heart? Union with the Lord Jesus must first take place, and then the destruction of sin will follow. As a general proposition, it is true that sin must be forsaken as well as confessed. And it will be forsaken *when the believer obtains grace to part with it*. But to desire the sinner to put away his sin when he comes to Jesus, is to require him to become in a measure at least his own Saviour. And should the thing even appear to be achieved, after a legal manner, or in the strength of nature, to what end is all this? Evangelical holiness is a fruit of faith in Jesus, and "whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

It is in vain pretended, that such exhortations to put away sin, are always united with an intimation on the part of the teacher, that the aid of the Spirit of God must be sought for in order to the due performance of the work in question. Even if this additional advice is given, and the aid of the Spirit is hinted at, as a thing necessary, (not that the utter spiritual destitution and complete inability of man is ever set forth by such teachers,) still the mode of instruction is unsound and unscriptural. *To sinners* the language of the blessed Jesus is ever the same—"Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest:" "I came, to seek and to save that which was lost:" "To call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

The severe reproofs of Jesus, as of his forerunner the baptist, are not addressed to the publicans and harlots, but to the Scribes and the Pharisees; to the teachers of the law; to the self-righteous; even to that class of persons who vainly imagine they can forsake sin at

their pleasure ; and who know not, that "the leopard can as soon change his spots, and the Ethiopian his skin," as the sinner forsake his sin, except by the grace of Christ preventing him, and "working in him to will and to do of his good pleasure."

There is a melancholy case which may be adverted to in connexion with the confession of sin, which is this—The believer under the transient power of sin, and blinding influence of temptation, may omit the all-important duty of confession. It may be that for a short season, whilst he avows himself, in a general way, a sinner, he is not touched with any suitable compunction for the particular sin under which he labours at the time. The Apostle Paul reminds us that there is a hardening effect attending the deceitfulness of sin, (Heb. iii. 13.) and the case before us is one proof of his assertion. But ultimately confession of sin will take place: for sin cannot retain its dominion over the believer, who is "not under the law, but under grace." And when sin ceases to exert its power, when the Spirit of the Lord again appears to lift up a standard against the enemy, the soul will be anew cast down in the view of its own delinquency, and return with weeping and supplication to the God of Jacob.

There are persons who strenuously oppose the doctrine of the continual remission of the believer's sin merely upon confession, on the ground that such a tenet is encouraging to sin, and must needs tend to its commission. 'For who will not offend at his pleasure,' say these objectors, 'if forgiveness can be obtained so easily? Truly here is a door opened for all ungodliness, and the saints may well exclaim, "Let us continue in sin that grace may abound."'

Now these opposers are altogether in the dark as to

the true nature of confession of sin. They know not that it is a work which man cannot perform at his own pleasure. They know not, that the Spirit of Christ is the agent here; and also they are ignorant of the fact, that the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of Holiness; and that whenever real confession of sin is made by the believer to his God, it is the Spirit of Holiness who suggests the confession. But the doctrine of sin pardoned *at all*, through the blood of a Mediator, is highly obnoxious to human reason. The pride of man cannot recognize this truth, and if the natural man appear to accede to it, it is in fact but an appearance of acquiescence. There is still a lurking hostility within the heart, which will from time to time betray itself in hard speeches against believing penitents. If to the orthodox creed of the true church, the homage of the lip be yielded, still the believer's creed will be insidiously attacked, although it is the confession of faith of the true church. The Christian scheme, even as a whole, may meet with a full assent, provided only that no one portion of that system is pourtrayed in living characters. As long as it is speculative, and restricted to the page of Scripture, all is agreed to. But not so, when it is discovered to be practical, and in active operation in the life of faith. In particular, the doctrine of the continual pardon of sin, is very offensive to those who are ignorant of the plague of their own hearts. They will insist upon it, that it must be prejudicial to holiness; nor can they be convinced of the contrary, except by the agency of that "Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him." Such persons are not aware, that in opposing what they conceive to be the false and mischievous faith of a weak mortal, they are in fact accounting the blood of the

covenant an unholy thing—"That they are doing despite to the Spirit of grace;" and are in the perilous condition of trampling under foot the Son of God himself. And shall the believer be told with impunity that the continual confession of his sin to God, with his conviction of the forgiveness of that sin, is much such an antidote for a guilty conscience, as that supplied by auricular confession, and the absolution of a priest? Long ago, even as far back as the days of Enoch, the Lord proclaimed that he would come, not only to execute judgment upon all, but in particular to convince ungodly sinners of their hard speeches which they have spoken against *him*. (Jude 15.) But amidst all the scoffs and cavils of the enemy, amidst the taunts and misconstructions of unbelief and ignorance, the disciple holds fast his master's word, and remembers that Christ has said, "Let no man take thy crown." He also repels the fiery darts of the wicked one with the shield of faith. For not only does man oppose the doctrine of continued and abiding justification through faith in Jesus; it is against this truth that Satan wages his most determined warfare. And how should it be otherwise? Can our subtle enemy be ignorant that justification by faith is a mere name, except the justification once obtained be for ever ensured to the believer. If there is no provision in the covenant of grace for the perpetuity of that grace, where is the believer's confidence? He is justified by grace from all offences. But he offends again. He repeats it may be his former sins; or he commits new offences not before committed. Now if there is no remission for new sins, how shall such an one escape from that wrath to come from which the Lord Jesus did most certainly deliver his elect, when he died for our sins, and rose again for our

justification? Satan will suggest to the believer who transgresses, that "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." (Heb. x. 26.) But were it so in the sense supposed by the afflicted conscience, certainly "grace would be no more grace," and "the covenant of the great God, ordered in all things and sure," would appear to be of less value than a man's covenant, which according to the Apostle, "though it be but a man's, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, nor addeth thereto." The accuser of the brethren is to be overcome "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of that testimony which Jesus has vouchsafed his people." (Heb. xii. 11.) Of how great importance is it then, that believers should be well acquainted with the nature of that testimony which the Scripture gives, concerning the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Christ. In our fierce conflicts with the powers, and principalities, and rulers of the darkness of this world, we have no defence save one—the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. The destroying angel dare not touch us, if we plead that "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us," and that we keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. He will in vain tell us we are sinners, for whilst we plead guilty to that name, we shall point to the blood which Christ shed for sinners, such as we are. Nor can he with success retort upon us, that our profession of faith is insincere, because our present sins witness against us. Our sincerity and truth is at least clear *on one point*. We would be saved by Jesus. We despair of all other help. We cling to his cross. *We believe* that he loved us, and gave himself for us. We do not say, when thus coming to Jesus, If we perish, we perish! No. The word of our testimony forbids this. We dare not account the blood of Christ to be *perchance* unable to

wash away our sin. What! was the blood of *God* shed on the cross for my redemption! And was it not of value enough for that redemption? Was the Eternal Son given for me! And was not the gift costly enough? Such thoughts as these the believer rejects, knowing that they are amongst the blasphemies against the Son of God, which although they shall be forgiven, are to be repelled, as hateful suggestions of the adversary of God and man.

The doctrine of continual remission of sin through the blood of Jesus is the strong-hold of faith. Into this fortress we retreat when sorely pressed by sin, and Satan, and accusing man. And the believer can say, 'The Holy Ghost has testified to the truth of this doctrine, in my heart, and in the experience (oh how frequent!) of my life. I have transgressed, and again and again the Lord has forgiven me all trespasses. My sins have been more in number than the hairs of my head, but his compassions have not failed. My provocations, always fresh, have been accompanied with new forgiveness. Oh how has he borne with my perverseness and my folly! with my pride of heart and self-seeking! with my wretched vanity and nothingness! Above all, how has he endured my hypocrisies and guile, my duplicity in his worship, my little reverence and love of his holy name! The catalogue of my sins witnesses against me; I am undone if the blood of Jesus does not purge away the believer's sins! And let the ungodly professors of morality plead with their scoffs as they may, in behalf of a righteousness which they do not themselves practise; the believer will attest that he finds the doctrine of free and full remission of offences upon confession of the same, to be *the cure* as well as the rejoicing of his soul. He is assured, let who will maintain the contrary, that his

own wounds, now healed, had remained incurable, but for the balm in Gilead, and the physician there; and that his spiritual maladies, now cured, would for ever have baffled the skill of the most skilful of the infidel and papistical projectors of morality.

All the objections that can be raised against the blessed doctrine of the free grace of God in the remission of the believer's sin, may be traced up to this one prolific source of error: the blindness of the natural understanding, as to the real nature and demerit of sin. The jealousy that so many exhibit when the grace of the gospel is fully proclaimed, does not by any means spring from any real love of holiness, for we find such persons altogether ignorant of the fact of their own death in sin. And as to the law of God, whilst they profess to extol it highly, *as far as it enjoins morality*, they know not that a curse is annexed to the violation of every one of the least of its commandments. They have no knowledge of a "God who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity." Much less are they convinced, that their own iniquity is such as God abhors. Hence they look with scorn on those who anxiously inquire, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most high God?" And more heartily still do they despise those penitents who answer the question and say, that a new and living way has been opened into the holiest of all, even into heaven itself, by the blood of Jesus; that this way is revealed in the Scripture; and that by faith we may walk therein, although defiled with so much remaining corruption of nature, as to be constrained to cry out continually,—*"Unclean! unclean!"* And it is evident, that the experience of the believer, whilst he is passing onward through this new and living way, must be enigmatical

to those who have no corresponding feeling of deep compunction for their sin, and no adequate conception of its malignant nature. The believer cannot maintain any peace in his conscience, except by a continual recurrence to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. But those who are heart-whole need no such remedy. Again and again the believer looks upon his Father's face, to assure himself that that august brow is not clouded by a frown. Oh how does he dread an eclipse of that smile, which makes heaven glad, and which reaches even to this fallen earth ? But how is his trembling Spirit reassured ? How shall he know indeed that sin has not separated between himself and his God ? "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin." By this word of grace he knows that he has still a Father in heaven, who is also "the God of peace." Here is his charter. It is written in characters of blood. But again we observe, all this is enigmatical to those who are unconscious of their sin ; nay more, it is matter of contempt to those, who, but for the intervention of the grace of God, will be ultimately addressed in the fearful language of the Scripture—"Behold ! ye despisers, and wonder, and perish." (Acts xxxviii. 41.)

10. *If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

It seems that the Apostle is most anxious to convince us of the great sin of those persons, who persuading themselves that they are righteous, perceive no necessity for the continual remission of their sins. In a former verse he affirmed, that our supposed immunity from sin was the effect of self-deception, and ignorance of the

truth; now he adds, that such an assumption is a flagrant attack upon the God of truth, whom we make a liar, when we thus presume to contradict his word. And as the apostle appeared before, to make a reference to the principle itself of sin, so now he seems to refer to the actual manifestation of that evil principle in the life and conversation; declaring that we are alike wrong, whether we say that in our case the flesh does not lust against the Spirit, or whether we pretend, even if it does so lust, that we have committed no actual sin by means of its suggestions. For, in his most holy state, the believer has sin in him, although there may be seasons in which its existence is not distinctly marked. By the grace of God, indeed, and by the power of the Spirit, the active power of sin may sometimes be so weakened as to give but little notice that it is still in being. The soul of the believer may be so much under the influence of faith, and he may be so absorbed in the contemplation of divine and eternal things, that for a time he may scarcely be reminded, that there is a treacherous enemy within his heart, who will yet cause him many a pang. The believer may be so occupied with the care of his soul, and so fully engaged in confirming his peace with God, that for a season no temptation from without may reach his abstracted spirit. He is in heaven, far away from the vanities and sins of this present evil world. He is not even tempted to transgress the commandments of the Lord. But even then, when the believer is most peculiarly walking in the Spirit, and holding converse with the Father and the Son, and delivered from external temptation, does he *forget* that he has a sinful nature? Oh no! The fact is graven on his heart. He has been convinced of sin by the mighty power of the Spirit. *His sin is ever before him.* He does not need

to be reminded that he is a sinner, by the plague of his own heart. The Law of God, which has been transcribed by the finger of God in the inward parts of his mind, reveals to him *his condition as a sinner*. He is not committing acts of sin, which need a present repentance and confession, but he finds that he has abundant cause to repent and abhor himself in dust and ashes for the sin of *his nature*. And *this* sin, this defect, this flaw, he discovers so accurately by the light of the word and Spirit of God, that in vain would any one attempt to persuade him that he is without sin. And for what purpose does he carry on his many conferences with the Lord? What is the subject of his many prayers? What petition does he present most frequently in the name of Jesus? And what is nearest to his heart when with intense devotion he makes known his requests to God? These questions are answered very readily by the experience of the child of God. He would have deliverance from the burden of *original* and *actual* sin. He would *know* that the Lord will not impute to him *the sin of his nature*. His anxiety is to this end. His chief diligence tends to this point. To be assured that God *can* and *will* remit the guilt and punishment of his sin.

But the scene changes, and the believer discovers that although he is justified by faith, sin is not long quiescent. He comes down from the mount, and pursues his journey through the wilderness. And there he is led about through many a circuitous way, which he fears cannot be the "right way to the city of habitation." Unforeseen temptations arise, and he is overtaken with many faults. In his first conversion to God, the axe had appeared to strike at the very root of sin, and so it did. But fibres of that root remained behind undis-

covered. Now it appears that they are so interwoven in the whole frame-work of the body and soul of man, that they cannot be perfectly eradicated, except by the dissolution of that soul and body. And the root of bitterness springing up anew, defiles the soul. What new sins appear! what vain imaginations! what corrupt affections! all followed by the mournful cry, "The crown is fallen from our head : Woe unto us that we have sinned."

Far, very far is the believer from arrogating to himself freedom from sin. At one time he deploras the original corruption of his nature; at another, the positive sins produced by that corruption. And after he is fully persuaded that his peace has been made with God, so that the sin of his nature is not imputed; and that the damage he sustained by being "conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity," has been completely repaired by the immaculate conception and birth of the Son of God, still he is humbled by the sense of his remaining imperfections, and every day he discovers more certainly, that salvation is of grace, and not of works.

It is not to be supposed that the apostle refers in this verse to those who opposed the doctrine of the fall of man, so as to deny that man is responsible to God for his sins; for he is not reasoning with infidels, but addressing the possessors of the Christian faith, who, as such, must have acceded to the Scripture doctrine that man is a sinner, for whom, redemption is provided through a Mediator. John is not now proving, as a brother apostle had done, that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." He is not considering the state of man by nature; but rather the believer's condition under grace. His meaning therefore is this: Should we, who are professed believers, arrogate

to ourselves such a degree of perfection, as to say that we have not sinned, since we received the grace of justification ; in that case, we make God a liar, and his word is not in us. For that word testifies, that " the heavens are not clean in his sight, and that he chargeth his angels with folly." Moreover, that there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not ; and that " in many things we all offend." (Job xv. 15 ; and iv. 18. Eccles. vii. 20. and James iii. 2.)

CHAPTER II.

1. *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous :*
2. *And he is the propitiation for our sins : and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

THE beloved disciple was well aware, that the enemies of God and his saints would blaspheme greatly, by reason of the doctrine of continual remission of sin through the blood of a Mediator. For no truth can be more abhorrent to human pride, than this of being saved only, and at all times by grace. Self-righteousness may perhaps assent to the atonement provided for original sin, but it will plead hard for its own fulfilment of the law, at least after justification, and with some aid derived from the Spirit of God. To be no better *in ourselves*, at last, than at first; to be debtors every moment to the grace of Christ, but above all, to be debtors every moment *to the blood* of Christ; it is this that man's proud nature hates, and he repels the idea that he needs such a continual remission of his sin. But how sweet is this truth to the believer who is conscious of the plague of his own heart, and the infinite demerit of sin. He cannot be told too often that Jesus is a Saviour. To him it is no wearisome repetition to hear again and again, that in the midst of the throne of God, there

stands "a Lamb as it had been slain." Nor is he ashamed to confess, even amidst the scoffs of avowed and secret enemies, that his main concern whilst passing through the tribulations of his life of faith, is still to "wash his robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb."

The apostle goes on to vindicate his doctrine from the objections of the carnal mind, in order that believers may be fully assured that it is a doctrine according to godliness. For he knew that some who were sincere in their profession of faith, and by no means actuated by the malice of the wicked, supposed, through their remaining ignorance, that the believer's sin could be best restrained by the terrors of the law. Now the Holy Ghost by his amanuensis opposes that error in the words before us. "*I write these things to you,*" says John "*that ye sin not.*" As some of you are but little children in the faith, ye may imagine that it would have been wise to pursue a different course. 'It may be you fancy, that instead of directing you how to find continual cleansing for your sin, it had been better had I exhorted you to look well to it, that you had no more need of fresh purification. But believe that I write under the agency of that God "who knows whereof we are made, and who remembers that we are dust." And more than this, that no other doctrine will so effectually promote real holiness of heart and life, because no other will produce such deep and abiding convictions of the love of God. We love him in exact proportion to our belief of his love to us; and "love is the fulfilling of the law." I repeat therefore, in spite of all the misconstructions of enemies, or fears of zealous but ignorant believers, that "*if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous : and he is the*

propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world;" for none shall be excluded from this grace of remission of sins for Christ's sake. His atonement is all-sufficient for all who shall avail themselves of it. And all will assuredly do this, "who are the called according to God's purpose;" who are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.'

The apostle told us before, that our sins are remitted upon confession, and cleansed by the blood of Jesus. But now he reveals to us a yet more blessed ground of consolation. Whenever we sin, even before confession,—for nothing is said of confession here,—we have an advocate at God's right hand, pleading with the Father for the remission of our sin. And were it not for this, from whence, we may ask, could we obtain the grace of renewed repentance, and the desire and power to confess sin? The whole matter of our salvation from first to last, is in the hand of Christ. "He is head over all things to his Church." Oh happy transfer of our life, with all things pertaining to that life, from the weak hand of man, to the mighty hand of God! Jesus is mighty to save. No cause that he has undertaken shall miscarry. And he undertakes the cause of the weak and still sinful believer. He saved him by his death. But "much more" says the scripture, does he save him "by his life." By his death he opened the gates of heaven to all believers. By his life at God's right hand, he secures their entrance into the "everlasting doors." Continually, Jesus prays for us, "that our faith fail not." When we are about to enter into temptation, then he implores grace on our behalf. When we have fully entered on our acts of

disobedience to his law, still he prays : he does not remit his intercession. It is redoubled in proportion as we need his aid. Oh could we see him, interceding for us in the heavens, when we are tempted to transgress his precepts, surely the sight would melt our stubborn hearts, and sin would be in a great measure despoiled of its attractions ! But this is the sight which we ought to see. This is the spectacle which the Holy Ghost sets before our eyes. And is it one that shall embolden us to sin with a high hand ? Oh no ! The very reverse of this is true, as those can testify who are made partakers of this rich grace of God.

“ *Jesus Christ the righteous.*” The apostle not only gives us the name of our high priest and advocate with the Father, but he designates him as Jesus Christ *the righteous*. Now this designation is full of the most important meaning : it opens to us at once the ground of our acceptance with the Father, and the reason why God “ beholds no iniquity in Jacob, and no perverseness in Israel.” The righteousness of the God-man is accepted in lieu of any righteousness of ours, and it covers all our sins. So when our breaches of the law would of necessity constrain the anger of a God who hates iniquity, Jesus pleads for us, that in him we are righteous, and no longer sinners. In the hour, when our sins would separate between our souls and God, and cause him to hide his loving-kindness in displeasure, then Jesus directs his Father’s eye to that righteousness of faith, with which his people are invested. And does the Father yield with reluctance to the intercession of his Son ? Would he fain mark our sin, did not his love to the advocate forbid it ? This cannot be : for it was the Father’s love that induced him to provide us such a friend at his right hand. The advocate was

appointed for us by the counsel of his own grace. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The whole economy of our salvation was devised by our heavenly Father. And although our sin was necessarily hateful to him, he loved us when we were his enemies. And since we are become his friends by the death of his Son, does he cease to love us? Or does he desire now to cast off that people whom he foreknew? He assures us of the contrary of all this. "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." We should ever trace back our salvation in Christ to the Father's loving counsel, because in this way we see how willingly he must admit every plea of the gracious intercessor. And let us beware of picturing to ourselves a God who giveth, but not liberally; who pardoneth, but upbraideth at the same time. The Scripture gives us another portrait of the blessed God. Here we behold him, "very pitiful and of tender mercy." "The Father of mercies, and God of all consolation." And when is our heavenly Father's pity most likely to be excited towards his children? Surely when they have most need of it. And when is that? is it not when they are seduced into forgetfulness of his commands? Ah then it is, that the Father's compassion is required, for no misery is comparable to that of sin! All evils are light compared with that grievous bitter yoke of bondage! But the Father has made a provision for every exigency of the believer's case, in "a covenant ordered in all things and sure;" in a covenant ratified by his own immutable oath, and by the blood of his beloved Son. Oh, monstrous thought! that the Father should cease to regard those with love, whom he so loved, as to give

his Son as the price of their redemption ! And as there is with God " neither variableness nor shadow of turning," so neither can man's fickleness prevail, (as some suppose it can,) to change the unchanging counsel of Jehovah. The omniscient God foreknew all the delinquencies of that people whom he decreed to save. Their sins against light, against grace, were all foreknown. But " as the Lord's arm is not shortened that it cannot save," so in his manifold wisdom, and grace, and power, he secured the recovery of his people from all sins. He decreed, that with every temptation there should be a way to escape, and that at the last a complete victory should be obtained by all believers over the God of this present evil world. In the covenant of grace, there is an express stipulation, that the reverential fear of God should never be banished from the hearts of the spiritual seed of Christ. They may transgress, but they shall return unto the Lord. For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again : so that the enemy shall not be able to rejoice against him. (Micah vii. 8.) In whatever way then we view the blessed truth of the prevailing advocacy of Jesus to deliver his people from all sins, its stability is the same. Whether we look at the perfect righteousness of the mediator, in whom as the beloved of the Father we are accepted ; or consider the fulness of grace treasured up in him, for the supply of all our need, the believer's security is alike apparent and complete. We are at all times, if justified by faith, virtually righteous in Christ, so that sin is not imputed to us any more. But because we are only in part renewed by grace, although completely justified, the Lord carries on the work of our sanctification, by imparting to us more and more of his Spirit. " Jesus is exalted to give repentance unto

Israel." And he dispenses the precious gift to his people, as their necessities require. And by his intercession he obtains all other gifts *for the rebellious*, that the Lord God may dwell among them. For ah, it is too true, that the rebel nature still cleaves as a polluted garment to the saints, although they hate it, as being "spotted with the flesh."

"And he is the propitiation for our sins." In the compass of a few words, the apostle sets before us the whole of our salvation by Christ. For he represents Jesus as our advocate, law-fulfiller, and propitiatory sacrifice. Nothing then is omitted; and all things pertaining to life and godliness are secured to us, through these different relations in which Christ stands towards us. His being "the propitiation for our sins," is the *foundation* of our hope in God. In considering the benefits we derive from Christ, we perceive at once, that the remission of sin must come *first* in order, and that "without shedding of blood there is no remission." Hence the necessity of the costly sacrifice of the Lamb, slain (in the counsel of God,) "before the foundation of the world." And whatever the carnal mind may think of the slight demerit of sin, God affirms that "he will by no means clear the guilty." The transgression of the law of God, is indeed a greater evil than we can fully understand, whilst we are ourselves even partially affected by the blinding influence of sin. The light of grace reveals to the believer much of the evil of sin, and he perceives it to be "exceeding sinful;" but its full malignity will only be manifested in the light of glory. Now we abhor ourselves, and repent as in dust and ashes, in the consideration of our base treasons against "the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords."

We perceive that it is a wonderful and horrible offence, that whilst the "ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib," man, rebellious, ungrateful man, despises the mighty and gracious author of his being, "saying to the Almighty, depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." And we feel, when convinced of our own sin, that we deserve to be banished from that favour and that presence, which by nature we reject and loathe. Still the infinite evil of sin, is only apprehended in a measure by our finite, although regenerate minds : for seeing, as we now do, all heavenly and eternal things, as through a glass, darkly, our imperfect comprehension of the infinite malignity of sin, is allied to our feeble apprehensions of the glory and perfections of the Great God. But when we see him as he is, and face to face, and in that view of God, become ourselves, according to the promise, like unto him ; then, our enlarged comprehensions keeping pace with our increased capabilities of knowledge, we shall perceive and confess, that as the half of the glory of our God was not revealed to us by the light of faith, so our former apprehensions of the evil of sin, as an offence committed against the sacred majesty of heaven, were most insufficient and defective. But although the light of glory dawn not upon us yet, we are instructed in the elements of all truth, by the word and Spirit of our God. By that word and Spirit the hateful nature of sin is made known to us in our hearts, by the teaching of the Spirit, who convinces us of sin, and in the word, by the distinct enunciations which are there made concerning it. Above all, it is from the spectacle of the cross of Christ, that we best learn what sin is. In the fall of man, as recorded in the Scriptures, the awful truth is

disclosed, that God will execute his judgment on the sinner. In the histories of the flood, which came upon the world of the ungodly, and the destruction of the cities of the plain by fire from heaven, we are again taught, that God will take vengeance for iniquity. But chiefly we are taught this, when we behold the righteous Jesus, bearing our transgressions, and in his own person receiving the stripes which were our due. If the justice of God, when he proposed to free guilty man, could not be vindicated in any other way, than by the death of his eternal Son, how infinitely great an evil is that sin, which could not be expiated, except by a sacrifice of infinite worth. If a less costly victim had sufficed, we must believe that the Father would have spared his only begotten, and beloved Son. But no created being, however exalted in dignity, however excellent in nature, could offer a ransom of sufficient price. "The blood of God" must be shed to atone for the breach of the law of God. And surely the magnitude of that "sin which is the transgression of the law," appears in this stupendous necessity. Here as in a mirror is reflected the terrific giant form of sin. We behold the dimensions of this image rising from the earth even to the throne of God. We see the sacrilegious out-stretched arm of the mighty traitor attempting to hurl Jehovah from his glorious seat. Next are heard the thunderings and then appear the lightnings of the insulted Majesty of heaven. God cannot be mocked with impunity. By a necessity of his divine nature he must punish sin. He must punish it according to its due desert,—He will not exceed the measure of just retribution, but neither can he fall short of it. Oh fearful necessity and most terrible and alarming justice of God, which constrains him to sue for the payment of the

debt of sin even to the uttermost farthing ! But that justice of God, which forbids that the guilty should be cleared, admits of the transfer of sin, from the offender to a surety. The case stands thus ; “ The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” There is no appeal from that decree. But should guilty man be able to find a ransom, a deliverer, one who in his stead can endure the wrath of God and punishment of sin, in that case, the Lord will pour forth his indignation on the surety, and the sinner shall escape. But helpless, miserable man, can find no such deliverer. Although in pride and madness of heart he says, “ I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God,” he does in fact “ dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, and which are crushed before the moth.” Miserable guilty man can do nothing towards his own recovery from sin. Although in the strength of that sin he is mighty to resist the Almighty, and even “ rushes on the thick bosses of his buckler,” he is impotent in all but sin. The audacious spirit which stretches out its hand against God, is powerless in its own defence. The mind which can conceive such rebellious and lofty thoughts against the sovereign lawgiver, can devise no means for its own escape from “ the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.” The tongue which can utter such great swelling words of vanity, all directed against the blessed God, cannot fashion for itself so much as those few words of prayer ; “ God be merciful to me a sinner.” Man can find no ransom for himself ; no deliverer ; nor is he inclined to humble himself beneath the mighty hand of God, and to solicit his friendly aid. But grace comes unsought to guilty man. “ And the Lord saw that there was no man,

and wondered that there was no intercessor ; therefore his own arm brought salvation." (Isa. lix. 16 ; lxiii. 5.) In condescension to our infirmity, God is described by the prophet, as though he were waiting to see what steps man would take towards his own rescue from impending ruin. And then the melancholy truth is disclosed. There is no man occupied in this work ; there is no intercessor. The hard heart of man, cannot so much as put forth one prayer for mercy. But what follows ? God's own arm shall bring salvation. " I have laid help," says God, " upon one that is mighty. (Ps. lxxxix. 19.) with whom my hand shall be established ; mine arm also shall strengthen him." (ver. 21.) In the foreknowledge of man's sin, his salvation in Christ Jesus was pre-ordained. Christ *as God*, could bear the weight of the sin of the world ; as man he could suffer. As God he could atone ; as man he was the sinner's surety, and stood in the place of guilty man. And when Jesus " became sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," those arrows of divine justice which were about to transfix his people, drank his life-blood instead of theirs — " the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." Christ is the propitiation for our sins ; and God can now be just and justify the ungodly. A way into the holiest of all, even into heaven itself, is opened for us, through the veil of his flesh, rent upon the cross for our salvation. And as God transferred our sins to the person of his Son, and took vengeance of those sins, as his awful justice required, in the person of the surety, we of necessity are free. God will not again exact of us the payment of that debt, which the blessed Jesus has already paid even to the uttermost farthing. Also, where sin is remitted, righteousness is imputed.

We are not only *guiltless*, because Christ is the propitiation for our sins ; we are also *righteous*, inasmuch as he is Jesus Christ *the righteous*, and that righteousness of his, he makes over to his believing people. Moreover we are *sanctified* as well as guiltless and righteous, because Christ is our *advocate*, as well as our propitiation and righteousness. He claims on our behalf those graces and gifts of the Spirit, which he purchased for his people, when he ascended up on high, leading captivity captive. He pleads with the Father that according to the tenor of the covenant "ordered in all things and sure," "he is made unto his people, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Let us then contemplate our complete salvation in the person of that Jesus who "is head over all things to his Church," "who has made an end of sin, and has brought in an everlasting righteousness," who endured for us the penalty of the broken law, and at the same time vindicated that law and made it honourable, and fulfilled all its requirements on our behalf. And let us confide in the all-powerful Mediator, and believe that our souls are secure in his hand. Let us by faith, again and again, commit them to Jesus ; relying with a feeling of perfect safety on his atoning sacrifice, his righteousness made ours by imputation, and his continual and prevailing advocacy, through which he insures for us the perpetuity of the faith and grace he has already bestowed, and obtains for us fresh supplies of every needful blessing.

3. *And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.*

Although it has been assumed by some commentators, that the Apostle John delivers his sentiments in this epistle, for the most part in the way of aphorisms, so that very little connexion is to be discovered in his mode of instruction, it does not appear desirable that this should be taken for granted. Certainly there is a peculiarity in our apostle's style, which perhaps may make him appear at first sight, to be delivering unconnected positions; but upon a closer examination, we may often discern that his statements have a *spiritual* connexion, although they are not strictly amenable to the logic of the natural man. As before observed, there is a deep spirituality in the writings of St. John, both in his epistles and in the gospel that bears his name. And hence the impossibility of entering into his meaning, except we possess the spiritual key by which the Holy Ghost enables us to unlock heavenly mysteries. Also our apostle discourses of spiritual truths in a way of great abstraction, and appears to deal for the most part with those principles of our most holy faith which are altogether removed from the apprehension of mere reason, however cultivated it may be. His words, like those of his divine Master, are in a very high degree "spirit and life." In what an apparently simple, but yet abstract form, does he present us with the vital truths of Christianity; and how deeply internal is the work of faith, as he describes it, in its various actings in the soul! His practical preaching is always this,—believe, and live, and love. We are presented with

faith in Christ as a first principle ; and faith in Jesus is a principle of life. With this principle of faith and of life, love is connected ; and " Love is the fulfilling of the law." How brief is the enunciation of these divine theorems ; and yet how surely are they the main links in that chain of practical godliness, which binds the believer to his Lord. But the structure and union of these ethereal links, eludes the observation of the merely carnal or common observer ; the harmony of the workmanship is only revealed to the well practised eye of faith.

The verse now under consideration is one of the many passages of Scripture, which are often misquoted by way of opposing those, who say and do not. More than this, it is supposed by some, to bear them out in their vain notion of substituting an external morality, for the internal evidence of faith. But the transition would indeed be abrupt from the grace of Christ to our own works, and from confidence in Jesus Christ the righteous, to confidence in our own supposed fulfilment of the law, did the Apostle now instruct us, to infer the existence of the knowledge of Jesus, provided that our outward life be without fault. Our divinely-instructed teacher, had just before reminded us of our liability to sin ; and had apprized us for the great consolation of our souls, that under the conviction of our newly-contracted offences, we had still an advocate pleading our cause in the highest heavens. Can we believe that he would now suddenly pass over to our own fulfilment of the law as the test of faith, and propose to the weak believers, whose consolation he had so greatly at heart, that they should reckon their sinful miscarriages to be fatal proofs that they did not possess the saving knowledge of the Lord ? It is impossible to conceive that

this could be the apostle's purpose. For although there are seasons in which the believer may undoubtedly perceive, in his ability to keep the commandments, a manifest token of the grace of God, and may very properly find in this ability a fresh confirmation of the reality of his faith, it does not appear that the apostle was contemplating any such case ; and much less, that he was insinuating a word of warning to the believers who might be tempted to repose so carelessly on the doctrine of the continual forgiveness of sin, as to forget that they had a warfare to accomplish in the destruction of their personal iniquities, and in the acquisition of the contrary graces of the Spirit. A more simple and obvious meaning of the apostle's words, and one which agrees far better with the preceding context, is supplied, if we suppose that by the word, "*Commandments*," is signified those peculiar *sayings* of Jesus, *which enjoin upon his followers a firm and abiding confidence in his power, to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him.* And then the Apostle's argument will run thus—I have been endeavouring to set before you the great propitiation and all-atoning sacrifice for sin ; I have shewn you Jesus as the High Priest of your profession, and your prevailing advocate with the Father. From this cornerstone, elect and precious, Satan your great enemy, and his emissaries, the earthly and carnally-minded professors of the Gospel, will try to remove you ; for this stone which God has laid in Zion, is still a stone of stumbling and rock of offence. "But hold fast your confidence which hath great recompense of reward," and "be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel." "It is a hope sure and stedfast, and cast within the veil, whither the forerunner, Jesus, has already entered for you ; even that Jesus, who for you is made an high

priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek." And let me add, "hereby do we know that we know him if we keep his commandments." He has given us unqualified injunctions to believe in his power and willingness to save. He has exhorted us to come to him that we should not perish, but obtain eternal life. He commands us to abide in him, and to trust unreservedly to his loving kindness and merciful protection. When the battle is hot against us, and our enemies are mighty, then he bids us not fear, but look to him as the Captain of our Salvation. And hereby do we know that we know him, if we have respect to his sayings. If we live upon his word, then it is, that we discover anew our interest in Christ. Every fresh acting of faith on the power and grace of Jesus, gives us an additional testimony to our knowledge of the Lord. Our continual observance of the precepts of Jesus, which directs us to trust in him as a Saviour from all sin, gives evidence to our own souls, that our knowledge of Christ is real and not fictitious. When we thus spiritually eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of God, deriving all our spiritual life and strength from him; when we are occupied in coming to Jesus, and to the fountain of his blood, believing that in so doing, we obtain remission of all sins; when we are clinging to his cross in deep self-abasement, but with lively hope; and when we can cast all our care upon him, believing that he careth for us, then it is, that "we do know that we know him."

The believer is exhorted by the apostle Peter, to make his calling and election sure, i. e. clear, and apparent to others, by the exhibition of all Christian graces in his life and conversation. The apostle James also requires, that the assumption of faith should be proved by its genuine fruits. Nor is the beloved John less solicitous

to enforce upon his disciples the whole counsel of God. We shall find him ere long pointing out to the followers of Jesus the propriety of treading in their master's steps. But in the verse before us he is directing the believer to look within rather than without, and to ascertain his acquaintance with Jesus, by a survey of his principles of action, rather than by his external works. Not that external works are not the indications of the state of the heart, for "the tree is known by its fruits;" but still with this admission, and the willing recognition of a most important Scripture truth, it must not be forgotten, that no apparent fulfilment of the law, is any sufficient ground of confidence that we know God, or rather are known of him. If the believer is asked, on what do you rest your confidence that you know Christ? will he reply, because I am conscious that my life and conversation are such as become the Gospel of Christ; because my fruits of good living bespeak the tree to have been made good? Impossible. He makes no such inference. Rather he will say—"I rest my confidence that I know Christ in this, that I do heartily desire to be saved by him: for I know myself to be a sinner, miserable and vile. Would that I could see some good works of mine tending to the glory of God my Father, and of Christ my Lord. I do anxiously desire the production of these fruits of holiness, but I dare not say that I perceive any in myself of such sufficient worth as to be able to infer certainly from them that I know Jesus. The utmost that I can say of myself in regard to the doing of his will is this—that I have in a measure kept his commandments, of repentance towards God, and of faith towards himself. I am conscious of a change of mind as it regards the blessed God. For in spite of the remaining insubordination of my mind and affections, I

can affirm, and I think with truth, that I desire unfeignedly to love my God, with all my heart and soul and mind and strength ; and for this reason, that I perceive him to be worthy of the perfect love and reverential homage of my whole soul. Worthy of *my* love and homage, did I say ? Oh wondrous thought that such a God should accept of the praise and gratitude of his sinful creatures ! But as he is pleased to say he will do this, would that the incense of my grateful and adoring praise were evermore ascending as the poor tribute of my love ! And methinks, I cannot but have a true faith in Jesus, for I know that I have committed my lost dying soul to him. I have believed in the record of his love ; I have perceived his fitness to save, and I have laid hold on his covenant of grace. My soul is conscious that it has been placed (by a faith which I believe to have been given me of God) in the hand of Jesus. Here then is the ground of my confidence that I am in some measure acquainted with the Lord, even through keeping the commandments of my God ; which commandments of his, repentance and faith, having been carried into execution in my soul, by the power of his grace, and operation of his Spirit, I cannot but perceive that a mighty change has taken place within my heart. There I find new desires, and new affections ; new hopes and new fears. Now I can say, I delight in the law of God after the inward man ; and can add with truth, “ Oh my God, how I love thy law ; it is my meditation all the day : mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I may meditate in thy word ; ” and gladly do I submit myself to Jesus that he may reign over me. To possess him for my Prophet, Priest, and King, is all my salvation and all my desire.’

Such are the attestations of the child of God, who

can discern in his renewed soul, the evidence of faith and of the knowledge of God; whilst on the other hand, if he looks at his works, his heart misgives, and he cries out, "Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He is painfully conscious that the things that he would not, those he does, (Rom. vii.) and that in the things he desires to perform, he too constantly miscarries and falls short. Hence he dare not look at his keeping of the commandments, in the common acceptation of the term, as his ground of confidence that he knows God; for his continual breaches of the law remind him of his remaining ignorance of God his Saviour,—an ignorance, at times so great, that when the believer measures its extent by the power of the law of sin, which still wars in his members, he would be tempted utterly to cast away his confidence of faith in Jesus, but for his conscious possession at the same time of that spirit of life in Christ, which in spite of all his sins and shortcomings, gives continual witness to the fact of its existence in his soul.

4. *He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

Many nominal Christians suppose themselves to possess a sufficient and satisfactory acquaintance with the Lord Jesus, because, as they imagine, they keep the moral law, and observe the ceremonials of Christian worship. But such persons are altogether in the dark as to the real nature of those commandments, which in their non-observance, mark the absence of the knowledge of Christ. The moral law is confounded with

the new statutes of the kingdom of God, and morality is supposed to be equivalent with the obedience enjoined under the dispensation of the Gospel. If the ten commandments be acknowledged as the rule of life, and professedly adhered to as such, here is the sufficient evidence, as some think, "that they know the true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." The wide difference between the enactments of Moses and of Christ, is not perceived. Both are considered lawgivers who have the one end in view of enforcing obedience to the same moral law. But this view of the case is incorrect. Christ is indeed the Lawgiver of his Church, and he enforces obedience to every commandment of God ; but still, *his* statutes are distinct from those of Moses, and in many respects very dissimilar. We may also add, that a knowledge of Christ is proved, by the keeping of *his* own peculiar commandments, and in no other way. Paul informs us of himself, that in his unregenerate state, he was "concerning the righteousness of the law blameless." He certainly appears conscientiously to have kept the commandments of God, and when he persecuted the Church of Christ he did it, thinking to do God service. What then, it may be asked, are those *peculiar* commandments of the Lord Jesus, the observance of which is needed, over and above the keeping of all the other statutes of God, in order that our professed knowledge of Christ, may not convict us of falsehood ? Now the peculiar enactments of Jesus, are these three : Repentance towards God, faith in himself, and love to his people. Of repentance towards God, there is no mention made in the moral law, but Christ enjoins it, as a condition of admittance into his kingdom of grace. He says, "Repent ye and be converted ;" and in other words,

"See to it, that ye are partakers of a new birth from heaven." And here is a main difference at once observable between the statutes of the Law, and those of the Gospel. The Law directs us to love God with all the heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. The Gospel enforces the necessity of an entire change of mind and heart, as it regards the blessed God. The Gospel does not annul the first great commandment of the law but it lays the axe at once to the root of our supposed power to love God, by directing us first of all to seek for a new nature, and a new heart. And so it discloses to us the fact of our possessing from our natural birth, a mind at enmity with God, and not subject to his law; a mind so greatly at enmity with that law which ought properly to control its every thought, that its spirit must be renewed and altogether changed by the mighty power of God, before the law can be obeyed. With the command of Jesus to repent and be converted, we find another linked: "Repent ye, and *believe the Gospel.*" (Mark i. 15.) Now the Gospel is the good news of salvation in the Son of God for a lost world; and here is a commandment to avail ourselves of the proffered mercy. The compliance with this command is the mark that we know Christ, or rather are known of him: its non-observance, a fatal indication, that we know not that we are poor and miserable, and blind, and naked, and consequently, that the truth is not in us. Jesus also commands love to his people as the badge of his discipleship. Here then is another statute, not to be found in the code of Moses or any other lawgiver, and its neglect, so sad and frequent as it must be confessed to be, bespeaks too surely an absence of the spirit of its author.

The apostle John is severe in his denunciations

against those who profess to know Christ, but refuse obedience to his precepts, but surely not more severe than the case demands. Such he says, are liars, although it may be, they are not conscious to themselves of practising deceit. Their ignorance of the truth is such, that they cannot ask, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" They have no suspicion, that in their supposed faith there is any thing wrong or unsound. Far from it. They imagine all to be right, and say to their souls, Peace, peace ! Meanwhile the awful day is at hand, in which every man's work will be tried, of what sort it is. The overflowing showers, and great hailstones, are about to fall upon every fabric built upon the sand, and the stormy wind threatens to rend the ill-constructed dwelling. Surely the foundation thereof shall be discovered in that day, when the walls daubed with untempered mortar, shall yield before the blast, involving in their ruin the destruction of the unwise occupants, to whom it is now said, in reference to that day of unwelcome knowledge, "And ye shall know that I am the Lord." (Ezek. xiii. 8, &c.)

5. But whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected : hereby know we that we are in Him.

The beloved John is fond of contrasting together the state of the believer and the unbeliever ; and this mode of instruction by contrast, is well calculated to fix the truth upon our minds and in our hearts. Again he turns from the mere professor, to the sincere disciple of Jesus, and enlarges upon the affirmation which he made in a former verse. His test of faith is still the same. It consists in keeping the word of Christ ; in

having respect to the statutes of his kingdom of grace. And now he adds, that the love of God is perfected in those who are thus obedient to his Son. The original purpose of the Father's love is accomplished, in the restoration of his alienated children from the death of sin to a new life of righteousness. The eternal counsel of mercy is fulfilled, as far as it is to be perfected in this earth. The future glory prepared for the saints, and the riches of their inheritance when fully revealed, will indeed manifest a perfection of the love of God, differing from that to which the apostle now adverts. It is in the world to come that the consummation of the purpose of love will be fully displayed, and in comparison of that final manifestation of the great love wherewith the Father hath loved us, the present accomplishment of his gracious decrees may to our dull apprehensions appear imperfect. But we should remember, that "all his ways are perfect," and rejoice in the Apostle's assurance, that in the care of every individual soul brought into subjection to Christ, the love of God is *perfected* in regard to that soul. The decree of salvation is in fact accomplished, although to our feeble sense, the salvation may appear to linger, and to tarry, and even to be encircled with many a cloud of doubt. The apostle's words are indeed full of rich consolation to the saints, who, it may be, doubt whether or not they are saints, but who possess the inward testimony that they cast themselves as humble suppliants at the feet of Jesus, saying to him, "Lord save us, or we perish." For is it not a thought imbued with peace, that the Father accounts his work of love to be perfected in us, when we submit ourselves to Jesus by a true faith? That upon our obedience to the command of Christ to repent, and believe the Gospel, the Father

beholds the *completion* of his gracious counsel on our behalf? How far from perfect does the work of our coming to Jesus appear to ourselves? We fear oftentimes some flaw in our mode of coming to him. We obey from the heart the doctrines delivered to us, but still we tremble, because the work is scarcely as we think begun, and days and months and years of trial lay before us, threatening it may be to destroy this work of faith, which we have only commenced in the name of Christ. But "the Lord's thoughts are not as our thoughts," nor his knowledge such as ours. In the rough ill-shapen seed he discovers the well-proportioned plant; in the opening bud, the future flower and fruit. Let the soul be ingrafted into Christ by the power of a true faith, which is the gift of God, and what remains, but that the work of faith be carried on with power? The vegetation of that newly engrafted branch may appear indeed at times to exhibit only faint marks of life, but eventually the divine sap will put forth its latent virtue, and under the culture of the heavenly husbandman, the weak and trembling believer, in his own eyes of stunted and imperfect growth, shall be evinced to be a branch of righteousness, a plant of the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified. Happy thought! that when we hope the good work of grace is *begun* in us, the Father sees it to be *finished*. That when we implore him to number us with his chosen, and to write our names in his book of life, he is then accomplishing in us the good pleasure of his will, and causing his love to be perfected in us.

"*Hereby know we that we are in Him.*" The completion in us, of the love of God, is the testimony to our own souls, that we are in Christ. The developement in

our hearts of the original counsel of God's grace, gives evidence that he has united us to his Son by his Holy Spirit. For except we are in Christ, as the branch is in the vine, from whence arises that sap of divine grace by which our souls are quickened and renewed from the death of sin, to a new life of holiness? We find within us living waters, even "a well of water springing up into everlasting life." And from whence is this experience, except we are in Him who is the fountain of life, and in whom are found all the fresh springs of his saints? Do we love God by nature, and do we by nature delight in his law? We know that it is not so. And can we come to Christ except by the drawing of the Father? The Lord himself assures us that we cannot. But we love God, we delight in his law in the inward man; we have come to Jesus for salvation; and we cling to him as our Lord and our God; Christ is in us as the hope of glory. Then the inference is plain: "*Hereby know we that we are in Him.*" It is grace and not nature which disposes us to love our God: grace removes the heart of stone, and gives us in its stead the heart of flesh, and there inscribes the law of love. Grace inclines us to come to Jesus, that we may have life. And the same grace keeps us ever looking to Jesus as the finisher of our faith. We dare not impute the carrying on of the work of faith in our hearts, to any natural principles. We dare not suppose that in that Adam *in whom all die*, we have also strength to live. The believer is taught a different lesson. It is to union with Jesus that he refers his spiritual life. And deeply convinced of his natural alienation from God, he exclaims, when conscious that the love of God is shed abroad in his heart, "hereby know we that we are in Him." "The love I feel to my reconciled God and

Father, is an evidence that I am *in Christ*; for that love is a divine gift which is peculiar to the members of the Lord's mystical body. Oh, my Father, increase that gift of love, increase in my soul all the manifestations of the presence of thy Spirit; and in their abundance may I know more and more clearly that I am in him; in Jesus; accepted in the beloved; "complete in him, who is the head of all principality and power."

6. *He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.*

It seems as though the apostle had reference to false or doubtful professors of the faith of Christ, whenever he ushers in the declaration of his sentiments, with the preliminary, "*he that saith,*" or as before, in chap. i. 6, 8, 9; ii. 4, 6, with the words, "*if we say,*" &c. It would appear that he often had in his mind those *who say* they have faith, but concerning whom it is at best extremely doubtful whether they are not deceived in this matter. And it is evidently a main object of the writer, all through this epistle, to detect false professors of faith, whilst at the same time he most carefully avoids the fatal, and, alas too common error, of breaking the bruised reed, or quenching the smoking flax. For the apostle's zeal in exposing hypocrisy and self-deception, does not at any time lead him to risk an attack upon the easily-wounded conscience of the trembling believer, who upon any charge of deceit, is ready to plead guilty, and to write bitter things against himself. There are too many teachers who seem to take part with Satan, the accuser of the brethren, in his hateful and terrible work of infixing the fiery darts of fear, and a misgiving

of God's love, in the hearts of his saints. Who say, truly indeed, but not at the right time, There is a truth in the inward parts, which God requires, and without it, can we be the objects of divine favour? assuredly not. Again, Are we among the Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile? Alas! conscience audibly whispers, that there is still guile in us; hypocrisies innumerable! And this being the case, as too surely it is, dare we believe that our profession of faith in Jesus is sincere? It is probable that such questions as these take place at one time or another, in the experience of almost all believers; and it must be so, for else, how would the heart take cognizance of its own state, and search and prove its ways? A diligent self-scrutiny is inseparable from the existence of regenerating faith, and the soul of a believer is made too keenly sensitive, as it regards the favour and love of God, to be able at once quietly to repose in the conviction, that it has obtained that faith in Jesus, which shall preserve it to life eternal, that faith which is imputed for righteousness, and which secures for its possessor the pardon of all sins. But these questionings are no longer salutary, if they perplex and harass the believer, if under the agency of Satan and ignorant instructors, they tend to undermine his conscious possession of faith, and to generate false scruples, and doubts of his own integrity. How carefully does the Scripture encourage our weak trembling faith! How tenderly does it pity our infirmities! It is the Spirit of the Lord which has taught us to say in accents of mingled faith and conscious imperfection, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

It is very clear, that in the verse now under our notice, the apostle sets before us what should be the walk and conversation of all the professors of the Chris-

tian faith ; and his proposition is so evidently just and reasonable, that it must compel an assent from all. But all are not aware, that Jesus has left an example, which it requires *faith* and *saving grace* to follow. All do not know that the life of Jesus exhibited graces of a character which the natural man *cannot* practise, however moral, conscientious, or devout he may be. Our righteousness must exceed or *excel*, (for so the Greek word may be more properly rendered, as Campbell shews,) the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, or we shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord has affirmed this. Our righteousness must be like his righteousness, or we do not abide in him by faith. We must possess the same mind that was in Christ, or we are not baptised into his Spirit. And what, may we not fitly ask, was that peculiar holiness of Jesus, to which we can in no wise attain even in the smallest degree, except by the indwelling of his Spirit? We are led first of all, to notice his zeal for his Father's glory, a zeal so intense, and pure, and holy, that in its manifestation and exercise, we are not only instructed in our duty, but also in the perfections of that heavenly Father, whom to love, and serve, and honour, was the supreme rejoicing of the Saviour's heart.

Christ's zeal to do his Father's will, reminds us of those claims of the ever-blessed God, which our apostate hearts are slow to acknowledge. In Christ's most perfect fulfilment of the first and great commandment, not only are we admonished by his example, that we are to love the Lord our God, with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength ; but the fitness, and reasonableness of such a service becomes most truly apparent. For as no man knows the Father as the Son knows

him, so in the fervid zeal and unbounded devotion of the Son, we perceive the Father's infinite worth. He who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, could also say, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." How superlatively great then are those claims, and how transcendent that glory of the Father, for which, and in order that they might be fulfilled and exhibited to the uttermost, the eternal Son took on him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. In the person of Jesus we have also the example of one who fulfilled the second great commandment of the law, no less perfectly than the first. It was indeed his meat and drink to do his Father's will, because it was the will of his Father, and because the execution of that will would illustrate the glory of God ; but also he rejoiced in the performance of his appointed work, from the constraint of such a vehement love to man, as continually kept pace with his love to God. The flame that animated the Saviour's breast, appears alike pure and bright, whether we behold it rising in adoration to the highest heaven, or shedding its benignant genial light through a fallen and dark world. Neither the law of Moses, nor any other law, whether revealed or written in the heart, did ever enable man to conceive rightly the nature of that love which is the fulfilling of the law. It is the God manifest in the flesh, who has disclosed to us this great mystery of godliness. And therefore the disciples of Jesus are now commanded to look from all other laws and statutes, to the pattern of the great law fulfiller. In him they behold their statute-book, and their living oracle.

The professor of Christianity, is therefore clearly convicted of gross ignorance, if he imagines that an ordinary morality, and decent attention to religious observances,

can by any possibility secure him a place amongst that people, who are baptized, not only into the name, but with the Spirit of their Lord. Nor are those persons much wiser, or better informed on the subject of vital Christianity, who exhibit, it may be, an *extraordinary* zeal in the worship of God, whilst at the same time, this zeal is not according to knowledge, nor according to the example of Christ. The word of God attests that there is a zeal for God which may lead a man to compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and a charity which can induce the gift of all one's substance to the poor, and that in these cases, there may still be wanting that "love which is the fulfilling of the law." The example of the blessed Jesus may be lost sight of amidst all this apparent zeal and charity. It may be that no one act of devotion is performed in a right faith; no one offering made out of a pure heart, and from a principle of unfeigned love to God and man.

Manifold as are the shortcomings of the believer, he still follows on to know the Lord. He is not greatly discouraged by the little resemblance that he finds between himself and his blessed Master, for he knows that he must wait for the period of Christ's second coming, before he can be perfectly changed into his likeness. But an increase of the spirit of Christ's holiness, is the constant subject of his prayer. He is by no means satisfied with his present low attainments. He ardently desires to possess more and more of the mind that was in Christ. His Saviour's zeal for the glory of the Father is what he covets most earnestly. And with that, he would also obtain His love for man. How is he burthened with the plague of his self-will and self-seeking! These loathsome monsters of inbred sin dare aspire to rob the blessed God of his glory. But they

are not suffered to reign peaceably in the believer's heart. Again and again they are dethroned. They show new strength, and presume again to eclipse the glory of the highest. Once more the Spirit of Jesus puts to flight the army of the aliens, and unveils to the humbled soul that divine glory, before which, self falls prostrate and ashamed. The believer too, cannot but compare his own proneness to *self-pleasing*, with the example of that Lord who "pleased not himself." Many an humbling confession, and many a prayer does he offer up, when convinced of his sad dissimilarity to Jesus in this particular. And when he contrasts the Saviour's lowliness, with his own pride; His meekness and gentleness, with his own easily perturbed spirit; His forbearance and pity, with his own quickly excited indignation; above all when he contemplates the boundless generosity of His goodness, and the vast, the infinite munificence of His love, and then looks upon his own niggardly heart, and dubious, and too often constrained acts of kindness and good-will, then indeed he is abased in the view of his shortcomings, and earnestly supplicates for larger measures of the Spirit of Christ. He is grieved that his heavenly Father is not glorified by his producing more fruit; he is grieved that Jesus should be so little honoured in his life and conversation. But let it be observed, that these humiliating convictions are not merely sorrowful; the believer must sow in tears that he may reap in joy; but ere long, he shall appear, bringing his sheaves with him. His confessions are not idle unmeaning lamentations. They are the effusions of a contrite heart, and with such an heart, the High and Holy One is pleased to dwell. And such lamentations issue in larger supplies of the Spirit. For conscious that we are poor, and miserable, and blind,

and naked, and in this consciousness coming to Jesus to be enriched, to be made happy in his love, to be enlightened, and to be clothed with righteousness, He will grant our suit, He will even "do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or even think."

From the text before us in its connexion with the preceding verses, we may observe, (and this is constantly worthy of notice in scripture) that in the word of God we find the doctrinal and preceptive parts of our faith so interwoven together, that we must infer it was the intention of the Spirit of God that they should never be separated. And they cannot be separated in the mind of the true Christian, who must ever have respect to the whole counsel of God. It is true, that if the believer possesses the faculty of analysis, he will not be satisfied with confused statements of the truth as a whole, for he believes that this would be injurious to his growth in knowledge ; but he will desire to become acquainted with its several parts in detail, and to understand the mutual relation and dependencies of each. He knows that faith is not work, nor is work grace ; but whilst he would have each of these principles distinctly defined, in order that their real nature may not be mistaken, and that in their combination they may not produce a false impression, he greatly loves to view them in their harmonious unity. With delight he contemplates that free grace of God, which, irrespective of faith or work foreknown, bestows upon the sinner the gift of faith. He is well pleased to discover, that the faith, which, irrespective of work, justifies, is also the faith, which working by love, fulfils the law. And when by grace the foundation of faith has been laid in the believer's heart, he is alike jealous lest he should unduly mingle together the grace of God and his own work, or

unduly separate between faith and its fruits. Truly the believer perceives that he lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. At one time his soul is quickened to a more vigorous life of faith, by the promulgation of the word of free grace; at another, he is animated in his Christian course by receiving the word of exhortation. Now the love of Christ is the constraining principle of action; now His example admonishes our wavering steps, and silently and sweetly provokes us to good works. Can the believer doubt that it well becomes him to suffer the word of exhortation, and that he has continual need of that word? If he does so, it betrays that his faith is almost extinguished by ignorance and folly. How is it that the saints are so continually admonished in the scripture, if they do not need to be reminded of their high calling in Christ Jesus? From whence this zeal and carefulness of the inspired writers, if we could dispense with their moving and forcible appeals? Most certainly we can in no wise dispense with them. We need all the stimulants which God has provided for our sluggish souls. The warnings, even the threatenings of God's word, we dare not overlook, because we are believers. Rather through these warnings, and even threatenings, as well as by his consolations, the Lord carries on his work of grace in our hearts. How often are we ready to slumber and sleep as do others! Then the Lord graciously rouses us out of sleep. He reminds us that without holiness no man shall see the Lord, and that we must follow after this holiness, and obtain larger measures of this gift of God, in order that an abundant entrance may be ministered to us into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We are sometimes ready to forget the divine purpose in our salvation, and that God

has predestinated his people, *to be conformed to the image of his Son* ; and therefore it is that our apostle teaches us, “ *He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself so to walk even as He walked.*” Conformity to the mind of Christ is a part of the high calling of his saints, and by the exhortations of the scripture, they are urged forward in their heavenly course. These admonitions, therefore, come with a divine power to the believer’s heart, and are instrumental in the production of those fruits of righteousness, which in the divine order follow the faith of justification, as certainly and as necessarily, as in natural vegetation, the flower succeeds the bud, and the fruit the flower. The imitation of Christ must take place, if the root of our faith abide in him. But not only does the inserted branch derive life-giving nourishment from the stock ; other influences also from without, promote its growth and vigour. We acknowledge at once the genial power of the summer’s sun and moistening rain ; but the keen breath of the northern-blast, and the sharp frost of winter, are also salutary in their season. In like manner the exhortations of God’s word, now tender, now severe, all tend to the same blessed end, the production in our hearts and lives of the perfect fruits of righteousness.

7. *Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.*

In the preceding verse, the apostle suggested to the faithful that it was befitting the disciples of Jesus to tread in their Master’s steps. But now, he appears to

anticipate some objection, from those who might consider the ancient statutes of God to be in a measure set aside, if they were not proposed to the Christian as his rule of life, but in their stead the example of Jesus alone. He reminds them therefore, that when he makes no mention of any commandments, save those of Jesus, and forbears to speak of any pattern of holiness except that which he exhibited in his own person on earth, this is not that he may present them with a new code of laws, unknown to their fathers, but the contrary. For Jesus as the Law-fulfiller, exemplified in every particular the perfect accomplishment of the two tables of the law, thus confirming his own memorable words, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

We must bear in mind, that the law of the creature's righteousness is no law of ceremonial observances, which may be given for a season only, and to a particular nation, only for specific purposes, which purposes being accomplished, the law is no longer of use, but is abrogated because it has become unnecessary. The moral law, or law by which man is bound in allegiance to his God, and in ties of amity to his fellow creatures, is of everlasting obligation, and from its very nature is insusceptible of any change. It springs out of the constitution of man's being, as the creature of God, and as one of many myriads of other beings, towards whom a benign Creator being affected with like love, and equally desiring their welfare, it is evident that he must require of each an equal attention to the well being of all. Now Jesus, as man, fulfilled the law of most dutiful and affectionate obedience to his God, and of perfect benevolence and love to his brethren of human

kind. He kept, in every point, that law which Adam transgressed so foully, when he became a traitor to his God, and also sinned away the life of all his posterity. Jesus fulfilled the old commandment which was delivered to man from the beginning—a commandment which cannot by any possibility become obsolete, and which no new doctrine can overthrow. But, as John declares of himself, he writes to them “*no new commandment,*” for “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” Love to God, inciting to obedience to his precepts, and love to man, inciting to such works as shall promote his welfare. Therefore when the apostle proposes to believers the example of Christ in lieu of all other laws, he does in fact propose to them the most ancient of all statutes, only in a way of example as well as of precept, for Jesus has given us both.

And in respect to the example of Jesus, which is set before us in the New Testament, as the rule of life, it may be observed, that herein we have *a most distinct and unequivocal proof* of the proper and essential deity of Christ. For except he be God as well as a righteous man, how is it that his righteousness and holiness is proposed to us as a model for imitation in those scriptures which always set before us *the nature and example of God himself*, as the rule of our holiness? Shall the creature, however excellent, or pure, or righteous, be coupled with the thrice holy Lord God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? Shall we venture to think, that sometimes God the Father is presented to us as a pattern of holiness and beneficence, and sometimes the man Christ Jesus, the one being true and proper God, but the other no more than a highly excellent and exalted creature? Thus to link together God and the most holy of created beings, is surely no

less than blasphemy against the one God, of whom alone it can be said, " His ways are perfect." If Jesus is not one with the Father, and possessed of a divine nature of like perfection, he cannot be fitly proposed to the human race, as in all respects a complete model for their imitation. It would be vain to say that as a perfectly righteous *man* he is properly our model, because if he is no more than a perfectly righteous man, we have a higher pattern still upon which to fix our eyes, even the likeness of God himself, so often proposed to us in his word as the object of our imitation. (Gen. xvii. 1 ; Lev. xi. 24 ; and xix. 2 ; Matt. v. 44—48 ; Luke vi. 35, 36 ; Eph. v. 1 ; 1 Peter i. 15, 16.) But the likeness of Jesus, is evidently in the scriptures of the New Testament identical with the likeness of the Father. The Lord attests of himself ; " Whosoever hath seen me hath seen the Father,"—and his example is proposed to us by the apostles indifferently with that of the Father. Sometimes we are reminded of the holiness and compassion of Him who hath called us, (1 Peter i. 15 ; Eph. iv. 31 ; and v. 1.) sometimes of the love of Him who gave himself for us, (Eph. v. 2.) as incentives to an imitation of these divine perfections. Nor can it be said, that the examples of the saints and excellent of the earth are also proposed to us in the scriptures as patterns of righteousness ; and therefore, that the deity of Christ is not proved by his being set before us as the model we are to copy. For it must be evident, that whilst we follow the faith and other graces of the saints, we can only do this with propriety, inasmuch as they have had respect to the author and finisher of their faith and holiness. And St. Paul reminds us of this on more occasions than one. For when bringing before us the great cloud of witnesses who had obtained a good

report through faith, that by their example we might be incited to a more holy diligence, he adds ; “ *looking unto Jesus.*” (Heb. xi. and xii. 1, 2.) As much as to say, I do not set the saints before you, as though they are patterns of righteousness, whom you are to copy, even as you are commanded to copy the mind of Christ ; for in connexion with their bright and encouraging victories over the sin that did so easily beset them, over themselves, and the world, I must remind you, that you will only obtain like triumphs by “ *looking (from them) unto Jesus.*” Their works of faith testify of Him who was the author and finisher of that faith. They bear witness to his Godhead : therefore “ *consider him.*” (Heb. xii. 3.) Again ; under the influence of the same feeling, the apostle adds, when he is proposing new patterns of fidelity in the persons of their spiritual rulers, “ *whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.*” Here the disciples are reminded that their excellent pastors are not so much themselves to be followed, as the end of their holy living to be considered ; even Jesus, who, as the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, is beyond doubt possessed of the unchanging attributes of the eternal God. Also the holy apostle is careful to tell believers when proposing *himself* as the object of imitation, “ *Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*” He would have considered it a fearful sacrilege to omit the latter clause of the sentence, or to forbear pointing out Jesus as the one object of his people’s faith, the one copy they should seek to resemble. But the pre-eminence which he is so careful upon all occasions emphatically to assign to Christ, confirms the truth that the example of Jesus is not proposed to us in the scriptures as the perfect

pattern of man's righteousness only : it is indeed this, but it is something more. The righteousness of Christ is the righteousness of God.

There is another sense in which the commandment to be like-minded with Jesus, was not a new one. For it was a part of the ancient purpose and eternal decree of God, that Christ should be the first-born among many brethren, and that his elect seed should be so one with him in Spirit, as to bear his heavenly image. In regard to the formation of the first man, who was "of the earth earthy," we are reminded by St. Paul that he was a figure of him who was to come, that is of Christ. And when in the beginning, we find the wonderful commandment issued, "Let us make man after our image, after our likeness," we perceive from the saying of St. Paul, that a likeness to Christ was a part of the likeness imparted to man at the first. Nor did man's disobedience and subsequent loss of the divine image abrogate the decree, although it appeared to be annulled. The immutable counsels of Jehovah are not impaired by the variableness of the creature. There is turning with man, but no shadow of turning with our God. Indeed we may affirm that through our mutability the divine immutability is more abundantly displayed ; and whilst we might well have imagined that when man transgressed and lost the image of his God, he should recover it no more, again we behold him rising in a new creation and regaining that lost image. The thoughts of our God are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways. The old commandment is still in force ; but more than this, it reappears as a new Law, endued with a more perfect efficacy. This the Apostle goes on to show in the next verse.

8. *Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in Him and in you : because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.*

The decree hidden from the ages and generations of the past, or at best obscurely disclosed, but now clearly revealed in these last days to the church, is with propriety called "*a new commandment.*" It is in the Gospel that we have the distinct announcement of the accomplishment of the fact, that God has formed a peculiar people for himself, who shall show forth his praise. And although the praises of him who calls believers out of darkness into his marvellous light, are mainly set forth in their redemption from the guilt and punishment of sin, God is also glorified by their bearing his own sacred image ; and by their expressing, even on earth, those lineaments of divine beauty which adorn the person of his Son. Not that we are to imagine the Saints of preceding dispensations, ignorant of the truth that they were to be holy as God is holy. To Abraham, God said, "Walk before me and be thou perfect." And under the Law and the Prophets, Jehovah proposes his righteousness, as the model of his people's righteousness. Also it would appear from the lovely portraits handed down to us in the Scripture, that some of our predecessors in the old times, exhibited as near an approach to the divine image of the Saviour, as perhaps has been attained by any in the present life ; and we know that God was glorified in their faith and obedience, from the testimony of his own word. But still, it is true, that since Jesus has given us a perfect pattern of obedience in himself, and has set before us the example of his own life of holiness, the mark of our high calling

as Saints, can be perceived and aimed at, with more accuracy than before. And as under the enlarged grace of the Gospel, we possess a more perfect light of truth, and more exact instructions in the way of righteousness; so also we possess more abundant promises, with their more perfect accomplishment. "*The darkness is past,*" says our Apostle, "*and the true light now shineth.*" Not only is the darkness of nature past, as it regards the Saints, who are called out of that darkness into God's marvellous light; but in respect of the church in Gospel days, it is true that it now enjoys a light of holiness, in comparison with which, all its previous illuminations were but as darkness. "*The true light now shineth.*" "God is manifest in the flesh." The mystery of godliness is revealed. And hence, reasons our Apostle, the new command is "*true in Him and in you.*" The new commandment is not only promulgated, but fulfilled. Christ has appeared as the first born amongst many brethren. He has fulfilled every jot and tittle of the Law of God, having wrought out a perfect righteousness. The second Adam has exhibited that likeness of God which the first Adam lost; rather, he has manifested that express image of God, which no creature, properly speaking, could manifest. But more than this, this thing is true, says our inspired teacher, not only in Jesus, but also in you who are his people; for you are baptized by his Spirit, and are made partakers of his divine nature. Your likeness to Him is not fictitious, it is actual and real. There is a Law in your hearts and minds corresponding to the Law that was in the heart and mind of Christ; the Holy Ghost having inscribed it within you, copying there the living characters which were legible in the life of Jesus.

9. He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

So far are all from possessing the internal as well as external light of grace, that some are found who profess to enjoy a state of Gospel illumination, whilst at the same time they hate their brethren who bear the sacred image of their common Lord. True it is, that the Gospel light now shines, and that all professors of the faith of Jesus, do in a certain sense walk therein. But what does the true light reveal? Is it not this? That God has a people who are the peculiar objects of his favour? A people everlastingly beloved? redeemed with the precious blood of his own Son, and created anew in his own likeness? And shall this people so dear to God, be hated by any who profess allegiance to the name of Jesus? Can it be that those shall be despised, whom God has so delighted to honour? The strange and seemingly impossible case is but too often found to be a true one. Our Apostle supposes a condition of spiritual blindness which has been fearfully realized in the history of the church of Christ; a condition which is still every day disclosing itself, to be the very state of a large proportion of those who call Jesus Master and Lord. The seed of the serpent is not extinct, but it still persecutes the woman and her seed. The enmity of the children of Cain is unabated, although they are assimilated in external profession with the followers of righteous Abel. But from whence is this hatred of the brethren of Jesus? Do they not bear their Saviour's image? They do—for the Scripture affirms this of them all. None are excluded from the privilege of being stamped with His holy likeness. But is this likeness

not recognized, and *therefore* not loved? That cannot be; because the lineaments of Christ, however faintly depicted, are always to be discerned by the light of the Spirit of truth. However feeble may be the glory of the new creature, most certainly it will be discovered by those who are possessed of spiritual discernment. But if on the other hand it be affirmed, as it ever has been, and is still, that the saints exhibit no form nor comeliness that they should be desired, but rather a character to be despised and hated, from whence is this, but because their adversaries "*are in darkness even until now.*" No saving light of divine truth has enlightened their darkened hearts. Their eyes are still holden that they cannot see. Spiritual glories are undiscerned by them, or they would discern the glory of the new man. And what if the outward demeanour of the saints be not altogether assimilated to the Lord's perfect image? "The king's daughter is all glorious *within*;" and it is there we look for her chief beauties, and most striking excellences. But shall we love the Saints for their virtues only? and because of their imperfections are we at liberty to diminish our regard? This is incompatible with a due respect to the command, "that the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus;" for the Lord does not love his people for their virtues, nor does he hate them for their sins. It was when we were dead in sins, and the uncircumcision of our flesh, and his enemies by wicked works, that Jesus so loved us, as to give his life a ransom for our sins; nor does he now cease to love his own, because he discerns in them so much remaining imperfection. He does indeed chasten and rebuke those whom he loves, nor does he suffer the sins of his people to pass by without reproof, and in like manner we may mark the sins of our brethren and reprove them

when occasion requires, but not so as to feel hatred to them on their account. But indeed it is not the blemishes of the saints, but rather their comparatively holy lives, which excite the enmity of a persecuting world. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." That carnal mind which is enmity against God, and is not subject to his law, must necessarily be opposed to those who are scrupulous observers of that law. In vain shall the faults of the saints be objected against them as the ground of offence. They may be faulty, but it is their faith in Jesus which is the real stone of stumbling. It is their faith overcoming the world, which makes them obnoxious to those who so love the world that the love of the Father is not in them. They run not to the same excess of riot as do others, says the Apostle Peter, and hence the unruly votaries of dissipation speak evil of them; the moderation of the godly reproving their own excess. Another cause of offence is this; that the saints will not flatter self-righteous professors of nominal Christianity so far, as to allow them to suppose that they will give them the right hand of fellowship, for the sake of those (nominally) good works which are not wrought in faith. And how grievous is this offence. Probably there is no greater. That the sins of the unregenerate should be condemned, excites their hostility, but a more deadly hatred is provoked when their *good works* are declared to be in the matter of justification no better than their sins; when both alike are condemned, and they are reminded that as the tree is, so is the fruit, and that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

But whatever be the exciting cause of enmity to the saints, the fact of its existence, clearly indicates the absence of saving faith. So our apostle affirms, "He

who hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now." His external light may have been bright, and of great extent, and his knowledge most comprehensive; also he may understand all mysteries, and his theoretic faith may appear correct in every particular; more than this, his works of piety and charity may be of a very imposing character: but still if there be found in him the dark spot of hatred to God's people, we cannot doubt that for such an one there is reserved, except he repent, the blackness of darkness for ever. In vain shall the enemies of the saints attest in the last day, that they did not discern the Lord's image in his people. In vain shall they say, "When saw we *thee* an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto *thee*?" This inquiry, so far from pleading their excuse, will convict them of having had only a name to live, whilst they were dead; and in righteous judgment, their part will be assigned them with the unbelievers; the God of truth vindicating in their awful doom his own love to that people, concerning whom he said of old by his prophet, "whosoever toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye."

10. *He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.*

The apostle now reverses the declaration of the preceding verse, and affirms that, as to hate believers is a proof of spiritual darkness, so to love them is an evidence of spiritual illumination. In the former case, he shows that if any man hate his Christian brother, his profession of faith is merely nominal; in the latter, that the love of our brethren in Christ, confirms the fact,

that we are really members of the Lord's mystical body. The conscious possession, therefore, of love to the followers of Jesus, is a satisfactory evidence to the believer that his profession of faith is sincere. For nature does not inspire this affection, which is of a peculiar character, but rather excites the opposite feeling of disgust and aversion. Nature, in some of her best moods, does indeed prompt to a sort of general benevolence, which is both amiable and useful ; and instead of the development of unmitigated selfishness and enmity, we have often the agreeable spectacle of natural persons, who evince friendly dispositions to their fellow-creatures, and are zealous in promoting the temporal welfare of others. Through the mercy of God, and the operation of his Spirit in particular cases, there are exceptions to what is certainly one frightful characteristic of that fallen nature, which the Scripture describes, when it speaks of men as " without natural affection," and " hating one another ; " implacable, " unmerciful, full of maliciousness, of envy, murder, debate, malignity." The apostate and depraved nature, which in its state of enmity to God, and alienation from him, must necessarily prompt to the kindred evil of hostility to man; is in very many cases so much softened and improved, that some may be led to doubt whether there is indeed in all hearts, that principle of enmity, of which the Scripture speaks as though it were common to all. But with the concession, that through the divine mercy all human hearts are not alike bad, and that some are even susceptible of benevolent emotions of a high order, we must still refuse to all except to the regenerate believer, the capacity for complying with the apostolic precept, " See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." Now the love of which our apostle speaks as

the evidence of our being sincere Christians, is of two kinds. There is a love to the saints who bear the image of Christ, and in whose faith and holiness we discern that such persons are, as the Scriptures testify, "temples of the Holy Ghost." And there is a love for the whole race of man, as man, and irrespective of any evidence which they may give of faith or holiness; a love which prompts to a deep sympathy with their infirmities, and an unfeigned commiseration of their misery, as being in common with ourselves, "by nature children of wrath, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, without Christ, and therefore without God in the world." The regenerate believer is perhaps naturally benevolent. Perhaps he received in the original construction of his moral being, some of those amiable and beneficent traits of character which are given to some men, rather than to others; or if education be the means by which the Lord imparts such blessings, rather than by a primary gift of nature, he has in the good providence of God, and through the intervention of second causes, all appointed of God, obtained, it may be, generous principles and dispositions, inciting him to works of mercy and of justice. In these respects then he may be on a level with natural men of amiable and benevolent affections and character. But he will differ from them in this: his schemes of beneficence will be more extensive than theirs, and his charity far deeper. He will seek to redress the temporal evils which affect his fellow-creatures; he will be most zealous to defend the oppressed, and to plead the cause of suffering humanity; to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked: but more than this, his pity for the dying souls of men will prompt at least an equal attention to their spiritual and eternal interests. And the love which prompts this

zeal, is no false fire of dubious origin. Sadly true it is, that there have been, and still are, those who will compass sea and land to make one proselyte ; the ostensible cause of all this zeal, being as they say, the love of souls, whilst in fact the basest feelings prompt the spurious self-devotion. But the love which our apostle describes is not of this kind ; God is its author, and he also unfolds the nature of this grace to the believer ; who amidst all the false appearances which a false charity assumes, can discern in his own heart, the evidence of this love unfeigned. The affection of the natural man for his fellows, does not rise beyond a desire for their temporal welfare. It is impossible that it should do so ; for however amiable, however beneficent a man may be, how shall he who is yet dead in his own sins, and the uncircumcision of his flesh, seek to rescue others from that wrath of God, which he has yet to discover is impending over his own head ? The believer has become acquainted with the terrors of the Lord. He has been convinced of sin by the Spirit ; and he knows that “ the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” And his deepest sympathy is excited for those who as yet know not that they are poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked, as it regards all spiritual good. Who know not, that the wrath of God abideth on them, except it be averted by repentance and faith, which are the gifts of God. And surely we discern the difference of natural and spiritual affection in this particular ; that the love of nature embraces the well-being of man in this present life only ; the love of the Spirit, his earthly life indeed, but also his heavenly and eternal life. Now to this “ love in the Spirit,” the natural man does not attain. That he should do so, has been shown to be

impossible ; for as before observed, this love is connected with those spiritual convictions which are peculiar to the believer, who is aware that the curse of a broken law hangs over the children of disobedience. And if the man of merely natural benevolence is incapable of exercising Christian love towards the human race at large, he is alike incapable of loving the brethren out of a pure heart fervently. It is even possible that he may hate the saints, whilst he is apparently full of good-will to men generally. And this alas has been, and is still, too common a case. The page of history attests the fact on a large scale, and in common and every-day life, its truth is also but too evident. The cause of this enmity is however easily explained, for in order to love the disciples of Jesus, we must begin with loving their master. We must be conscious of his beauty, and enamoured of it, before we shall perceive and admire his likeness in his people. Our love then to Jesus is the spring from whence must flow our love to his saints ; love to him, the fountain from whence proceed those innumerable rills which reach to every member of his mystical body, the church. And this love to Jesus is the heritage of his saints alone ; they only possess it. It is the gift of God to their souls, a divine gift, a fruit of the Spirit. No produce of the natural heart, but the purchase of the Saviour's own love. He obtained it for his people, and he imparts it to them, whispering to their hearts by that voice of the spirit, by which he brings all things to their remembrance, " if ye love me, keep my commandments ; and this is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you."

11. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

If there is one Christian grace rather than another to which the Apostle John affixes the seal of the Spirit, it is love of the brethren : if there is any one feature of character upon which he especially sets the stamp of reprobation, it is hatred of believers. This is the dark spot, which marks out the seed of the serpent, who from the beginning were described by God himself as those who should be at enmity with the seed of the woman, even with Jesus and his saints. (Gen. iii. 15.) . Our Lord also emphatically points out in several of his conversations with his disciples, that this most ancient prediction must needs be fulfilled in the experience of the Church. How often does he advert to the enmity, which shall be displayed in direct acts of hostility to his people ; and all this *for his name's sake*. " If the world hate you," says Jesus, " ye know that it hated me before it hated you ; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." Here our Lord discloses to his Church, the real ground of the hatred entertained against them ; "*because I have chosen you out of the world.*" This is an offence unpardonable, that the despised saints should enjoy so high a prerogative ; above all, that they should claim it, and avow it to be theirs. What, say their enemies, with scoffing contemptuous mockery, and are these indeed the heirs, for whom the inheritance is reserved ? Let us kill these heirs, that the inheritance may be ours. That it is the Father's good pleasure to give the

kingdom to a little flock of comparatively insignificant persons, who lay claim to no merits beyond those of mankind at large, but who at the same time affirm that they have "a good hope through grace," that they are actually the heirs described in the Scripture; this good will of the Father, and this assumption of the saints, that they are actually the beloved of God, excites the indignation of those who refuse to come themselves as humble suppliants to Jesus, that they also may be made partakers of the hope of eternal life. In describing the state of such adversaries, how does our apostle multiply expressions significant of their death in sin. They are in darkness: they walk in darkness: they know not whither their fatal enmity tends; they know not the fearful goal to which it is hastening their steps. Darkness hath blinded their eyes; true, they might see, but they do not. "The true light now shineth;" they are encircled with its bright beams; but in God's light, they do not see light. They see Jesus and they hate him, although they call him Master and Lord, and do, it may be, many works in his name. And they behold the saints, who bear their Master's image, but discern in them no form nor comeliness, that they should be desired. The ameliorated condition of society, in some places, and at some periods, and various combining circumstances, may prevent the full developement of this principle of hatred, but it is deeply lodged in the unregenerate heart. To the eye of man, the exterior demeanour may be courteous and even kind. The contempt that is within the heart may not be expressed. But if it be there, it is discerned by that eye, which looks not on the outward appearance, but which tries the reins and hearts of the children of men: by that eye of God which is not only quick-sighted to dis-

cover every feeling of lurking hostility to his saints, but is itself so sensitive of any injustice done them, that by an instinct of sympathy, as it were, as well as by the scrutiny of divine intelligence, it is conscious of every offence committed against them.

12. *I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.*
13. *I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.*
14. *I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.*

By these verses, which contain particular addresses to believers, in different states of the life of faith, we are instructed, that this life consists in a gradual advance from spiritual infancy to a fulness of manhood and maturity of stature in Christ Jesus. The same truth is set before us in other parts of Scripture, but here with a peculiar exactness, believers being addressed by those appellations, which are in common use to distinguish the natural and progressive periods of the life of man.

It is evident that by the epithet, "*little children*," our apostle marks out the same class of believers, who are designated "*new born babes*" by a brother apostle, and "*lambs*" by the Saviour himself. And from

the circumstance of their being *first* addressed, we may infer that the comparative weakness of their spiritual condition, made them objects of peculiar interest to the beloved disciple. His thoughts are first directed to them, and they are first named as those to whom he writes. Nor can we omit observing here, that the Apostle's example affords a model for all Christian pastors, who should imitate John in their care for believers of tender growth; and above all should keep in view the example of that chief Shepherd, who "carries the lambs in his bosom," and who requires of the overseers of his flock a like tender solicitude for the objects of their pastoral care.

Let us enquire, what is the encouragement afforded to the babes in Christ, by the apostle's words. It may be replied generally, that John would not have the little children ignorant of the fact that they were as truly in Christ, as believers of a more advanced growth. Whatever he wrote for the consolation of the young men and fathers, he wrote also for them. All the privileges of the Gospel were for them, as well as for the strongest believers. By reason of their tender age, and because their senses were not as yet duly exercised in discerning spiritual things, they might be still very ignorant of the true nature of their state of grace. But he would at once remind them, of one glorious truth: a truth so precious and important, that if received in faith, none could question, whether the little children were not necessarily and properly as much the objects of apostolic care, as the apparently more important members of the Lord's mystical body. The apostle reminds the little children that *their sins are forgiven them, for the name's sake of Jesus*. Then, however low their estimate might be of themselves, how-

ever much they might doubt whether they were worthy to be addressed in common with disciples of higher attainments, the fact that they had already obtained the remission of their sins, must for ever set at rest, the question of their supposed inferiority, and imagined unworthiness. The distinguishing blessing of the Gospel is this : " redemption through Christ's blood ; even the forgiveness of sins." In speaking of the salvation of sinners, the Scripture very often reminds us briefly, that it consists in one point ; the forgiveness of their iniquities, and the covering of their sins : " and where sin is forgiven," says the Apostle Paul, " righteousness is imputed." Therefore the forgiveness of sin implies and secures the imputation of righteousness, and the little children are righteous, even as the young men and fathers are righteous. They have been invested with the same heavenly gift ; for truly this righteousness is a gift, and is dispensed to believers irrespective of their growth in the divine life. But how few amongst us appear to rejoice duly in the knowledge of sin forgiven, and of righteousness imputed. Those who from their apparent standing in the Church of Christ, we must suppose to be young men, or even fathers, are deficient here. They do not testify of sin forgiven for his name's sake. This matter of absorbing interest, does not appear to affect their hearts. It may be, they have never yet felt the pressure of their sins to be so heavy, as to compel them to seek deliverance from the intolerable load. It must be so, in every case, where the incomparable worth of the doctrine of the forgiveness of sin is not felt and appreciated. Those who are born of the Spirit, are most surely convinced of sin, for most certainly the Holy Ghost enlightens the minds of the faithful as to the nature and demerit

of sin ; and where there is not only an apparent but an actual indifference as to the fact of the forgiveness of sin, it may fairly be inferred, that the heart has never known its own bitterness and its own plague.

Those who are really partakers of that birth which is from above, are truly convinced of sin, and this in a way peculiar to the regenerate. Peculiar, it may be said, to the regenerate, because there are convictions of sin from natural conscience, which are of a kind distinct from those which mark the enlightening operations of the Holy Ghost. The natural man has a law written in his heart which may give judgment against sin, and condemn him for his acts of disobedience. The internal monitor may reprove him for his transgressions, and even inflict in his heart the pang of remorse. And although in some cases, especially when the persons thus affected, are afterwards the subjects of regenerating grace, it may be considered doubtful whether this work of conviction be not a preparatory work of the Spirit, thus much may be affirmed without fear of error ; that the convictions which unequivocally attend a work of divine illumination, not only give warning of sin, but of the wrath of God revealed from heaven against that sin. For we may observe, (and it is important to mark the distinction) that the unregenerate when convinced of sin, are not also alive to the awful truth, that because of their sin, the curse of a broken law is suspended over their guilty heads. They are indeed convinced of sin, for natural conscience testifies against them, informing them of their misdeeds. But what more does it tell them ? If any thing it is this. To repent, and amend their doings, and in this way to obtain that inward peace, which is interrupted by their consciousness of transgression. Hence the truth

of that saying, that conviction and conversion are not necessarily united. There may be conviction of sin, and it may be a merely natural conviction. There may be amendment of life, and this may also be the result of conviction of sin, and yet without the operation of special grace. But where there is an influence of special grace, and a sound work of conversion going on in the sinner's mind, he is directed by the agency of the Spirit, to seek peace of conscience, not in his own repentance or amendment of life, but by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. Indeed no repentance however deep or agonizing, and no consciousness of amendment of life, however sincere or exemplary, can by any possibility give peace to that soul which is awakened to a sense of its condition as one of the "children of wrath." It is this wrath of God which alarms the really convinced soul. The broken law with its penalty of death, not only threatens him, but has laid hold on his trembling spirit. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." These terrific words ring in his ears, and sound within his heart. The avenger of blood is at hand, and the terrors of the Lord are about to be revealed. And then it is that the soul cries out, "what shall I do to be saved?" It may be that the way of pacifying conscience, with repentance and amendment of life, has been tried and found unsuccessful. The wound is too deep to admit of any cure save one: the blood of Jesus is the only balm for the conscience slain by the sentence of the broken law. The new covenant sealed in the blood of God, and without conditions on the sinner's part, except that of faith, which faith is also a gift and a part of the covenant; this new covenant of grace is the only refuge of that conscience-stricken soul, which finds the sentence of death in it-

self. That soul is pierced through with the arrows of God's wrath. They stick fast within it. And what hand shall extract them, save the hand "that is mighty to save?" That hand concerning which the Psalmist says in the anguish of conscience, "it presseth me sore," that same hand must lift up the sinner from the pit of corruption, and from that lowest hell which he sees open to receive him. And surely we may venture to assert, that of all the good news which can at any time meet the believer's ear, this is the most precious and important: "*your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.*" For how grievous to the really convinced soul is the weight of sin, how intolerable its burthen! How terrible is it to feel that the mighty God is our enemy, and justly our enemy; that we are threatened with his indignation, and menaced with all the curses of his broken law. And how does the soul confess in that bitter agony, that it has indeed a taste of that fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries. But in that strife of conscience, and that war within the soul, a war in which Satan and the powers of darkness are not inactive or impotent, surely it is beyond expression blessed to hear the accents of the God of peace commanding his ambassadors "to speak comfortably to Jerusalem," and to cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, "*that her iniquity is pardoned;*" to hear the apostle of the Prince of Peace proclaim the tidings, "*Little children, your sins are forgiven you, for his name's sake.*"

The little children, whose amount of spiritual knowledge is necessarily small, may nevertheless attain, without delay, the all-important knowledge of the blessed truth, "that God does not discern iniquity in Jacob, nor

perverseness in Israel.” The fact of their faith in Jesus being unquestioned, there is no doubt as to their state of grace. If in virtue of a birth from above, they have received Christ, and believed on his name, they have also obtained from their Lord the privilege of adoption into his Father’s family. (John i. 12, 13.) Moreover, inasmuch as the Lord has said to them in his New Covenant of grace, that “he will be to them a God, and that they shall be to him a people,” this blessed assurance is grounded in another promise, even in that remission of sins which is the basis of the whole covenant. (Heb. viii. 8, 12.) With propriety therefore does our apostle present to the little children, that doctrine of remission of sin, without which their faith in God’s mercy, and their confidence of their own acceptance, would be without proper foundation. Nor does he hesitate to declare the full truth as it is in Jesus to these little ones. He is not deterred by any fear of their mistaking the nature of this fundamental doctrine of their most holy faith. Far from it. He presents it at once, distinctly and unequivocally ; “ your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake.” And enlarging upon the apostle’s words, we may imagine the little children to be thus addressed : By reason of your tender age, the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are almost unknown to you : But you have already entered into that kingdom, and you are, in Christ, members of his mystical body the church, and partakers of all the blessings which he has purchased for his people. Do you doubt this ? And do your hearts misgive ? Weary with the burthen of your sins, and heavy laden with the sense of the divine displeasure, you have come as humble suppliants to your God, imploring him for the name’s sake of Jesus to take you into his favour, and to visit you

with his salvation. You have fled from the wrath to come, to lay hold upon the hope set before you in the gospel. You have believed in the truth of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, for you have not been insensible to the terrors of the Lord; and you have given credit, not only to the word of threatening, not only have you believed in the fearful declaration, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," you have also obeyed the command of God to approach him in the name of his Son, coming in that name for the promised mercy. Now having done all this at the Lord's bidding, and by the power of his Spirit, you have most assuredly laid hold upon God's covenant of peace. That the privilege of adoption is yours, is most apparent. But you have not as yet, it may be, faith to claim this privilege as your own. Your measure of faith has sufficed to convince you that you are a lost sinner, and but for God's mercy must perish. Your faith has shown you, that it is only in and through Jesus, that God will dispense his mercy to you. And by faith you have humbly acquiesced in this counsel of God to save sinners only for his Son's sake. All you have sought is salvation; your cry has been, "Lord, save me, or I perish." And again, "Save me in thine own appointed way. I plead the name of Jesus; save me for his sake." Still you have not perhaps as yet, made use of the right which God has made over to you, in virtue of your having thus received Christ. But because you have thus believed in his name, most surely you possess a right to become the children of God. Your title is clear, and I announce to you, that "*your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.*" To all who have faith in the name of Jesus, sin is forgiven. This is the privilege of all believers, be their standing in the divine

life what it may : whether their faith be recently bestowed, or matured and made fruitful in outward working, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And as the grace of remission of sin is altogether by gift, and not of works, believe and know that you have present pardon of all offences, nor look to the future for what you have already obtained. In the name of Jesus, and by his authority, as an apostle of the Lord, I announce the fact that the bonds of every believing soul are loosed. Fear not, ye little ones, "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Your sins are many, more in number than the hairs of your head. You cannot number them, for every imagination of the thoughts of man's unregenerate heart are only evil, and that continually. But again I say, fear not ; *your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.*

How much assurance do the babes in Christ require on this point, of the forgiveness of sin. It is to their troubled hearts the one thing needful. Hence the deep solicitude manifested by our apostle, to confirm the believer's faith in this particular. He well knew the lurking fears which agitate the hearts of returning prodigals, and with what trembling dread they suspect their own state of grace, and think that perchance they have still a lie in their right hand, and are not as yet perhaps really quickened from the death of sin. To such it may always be safely said, From whence these anxieties but for the drawings of the Father's grace ? From whence these convictions of sin ; from whence this prostration of soul beneath the mighty hand of God, except for the quickening influences of the Holy Ghost ? Have you indeed fled from the wrath to come, to lay hold upon the hope set before you in the Gospel, by an instinct of nature only ? Nature does indeed prompt her offspring

to escape from the evils of this life, but she does not instruct them in the belief of that wrath of God which hangs over the impenitent. Nature will suggest perhaps, that God will be pleased by the doing of his will, but she does not suggest that "this is the will of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." To cast the soul upon the mercy of God in Christ, is an act of faith, it is no work of nature. Nature, if she does discern any peril in regard to the soul, may suggest modes of salvation of her own devising, but never does she point to Jesus, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." No; this is the Spirit's work: it is his office to take of the things of Christ, and shew them to the soul: and it is the work of faith to be obedient to the Spirit's teaching, and to comply with his divine monitions. Then, whenever there is such knowledge as has been described, the Holy Ghost is commencing a work in that heart: wherever there is a glad and submissive yielding to the teaching and admonition of the Spirit, there is faith, precious faith, the "faith which is of the operation of God," the faith of his elect.

It is of the utmost importance that the new convert should be fully instructed in the article of his justification from sin, for if he be not, how shall he "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," which he is commanded to be; and how shall he "rejoice in hope of the glory of God," by reason of the grace wherein he stands? (Rom. v. 12.) "Rejoice in the Lord," says St. Paul to the believer, "and again I say, rejoice." But how shall any child of man fulfil such a requirement, till he knows that his iniquities are forgiven him for the name's sake of Jesus? It is the consciousness of sin forgiven, which gladdens the believer's heart. Nothing

else, no other knowledge, no other conviction can rejoice his soul, as this one truth makes it glad. To know that the mighty fearful load is removed ; to be assured on the warrant of God's word, that the debt is paid ; to have it under the hand and seal of God that the law is satisfied, this is peace, this is joy. But there is no peace, no joy without this knowledge, except it be the false peace of a deceived heart, and the joy of the hypocrite which endureth but for a moment. That the forgiveness of sin is in the believer's estimation the most precious benefit of God, let the experience of the saints testify. In the 103rd Psalm, when David is calling upon his soul, and upon all that is within him to bless the Lord and his holy name, to which of the manifestations of the divine goodness does he in the first place refer ? It is to the forgiveness of sins ; " Who forgiveth all thine iniquities." And when in the 32nd Psalm, he is describing the truly blessed man, what is the leading point in the description ? " Blessed is the man whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord will not impute sin." And if it be so, as assuredly it is ; if sin is 'the intolerable load which the convinced sinner can by no means endure, and if by faith he is most certainly set free from the oppressive weight under which he groans, how is it that the fact of his liberty is not proclaimed by those who bear the office of the heralds of the gospel. The trumpet of the jubilee, the word of God, is in their hands and in their mouth. Why then are not the prisoners set free ? Why are not the captives loosed ? The pardon of the criminal has been signed by the King of kings ; he has even signed it with his own blood. But it is not delivered ; it is useless. The galling fetters of sin encircle the poor captive's limbs ; " He is fast bound in

misery and iron." The word of the Lord should have delivered him from his destruction, (Psalm cvii. 20.) for the Lord sent it to that end, but the ministers and stewards of the mysteries of his kingdom have been found unfaithful. Unconscious themselves of the weight of sin, themselves ignorant of the wrath of God, and alike careless about the remission of those offences, which they do not even believe they have committed, they do not feel for the burthened state of others, nor are they solicitous to proclaim to the weary and heavy-laden, the name of that Jesus who saves his people from their sins.

But is it only to the novice, that the doctrine of the forgiveness of sin for the name's sake of Jesus is important? Can the young men and fathers in Christ dispense with the apostle's announcement? Having already, and long ago it may be, known and believed this truth, do they not need to hear it any more? Is this doctrine only milk for babes? God forbid that the young men and fathers should account it such. It is their strong meat. Long ago their sins were forgiven them for the name's sake of Jesus; long ago they received remission of all trespasses. And what are they doing now? Are they not washing their robes, and making them white in the blood of the Lamb? Are they not still coming to a mercy seat, still pleading with God to remit their sins for the name's sake of Jesus? All believers will testify that they are so occupied. All believers of whatever standing in the household of faith will be ready to confess, that they cling to the doctrine of the forgiveness of sin for Jesus' sake, as to the charter of their liberty and life. Indeed this is the believer's charter. Without it he is lost. With it he can neither perish nor come into condemnation.

"For his name's sake." Sin is forgiven for the name's

sake of Jesus ; and this fact makes the name of Christ very dear to his believing people. "Thy name is as ointment poured forth," says the spouse in the Canticles, "and therefore do the virgins love thee." The oil of grace flows into the believer's wounded heart and stricken conscience, and the anguish of the smart of sin is assuaged. The wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores of the sin-sick soul are mollified with this heavenly ointment. (Isaiah i. 6.) The name of Jesus is that balm of Gilead, by means of which the health of the daughter of Zion is recovered. (Jer. viii. 22.) The one name given under heaven whereby men shall be saved. (Acts iv. 12.) The "name above every name," for with no other is forgiveness of sin connected. And if asked, what does that all-prevailing name signify, and how does it so effectually avail for the forgiveness of sins ; we answer, the name of Jesus is expressive of his nature, his divine perfection, his work, his office. Jesus is the Lord, the Saviour, who saves his people from their sins. His name signifies salvation : but more than this, the salvation of Jehovah. Remission of sin could not by any possibility be accorded for the name's sake of any creature, but it is granted for the name's sake of Jesus, who is no creature, but the Creator, the value of whose atoning work as "God manifest in the flesh," is aptly signified by the name of Jesus, the *Saviour*, *God*.

Whilst passing on from the consideration of the all-important truth of the forgiveness of the believer's sin for the name's sake of Jesus, it is well still to bear in mind, that this doctrine is the peculiar, the distinguishing doctrine of the Christian faith. Other truths demand our attention, for we live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, but yet salvation is more immediately connected with some truths than with

others ; and of all truth, we repeat,—this is the most important, that our sins are forgiven us for his name's sake. Here is the foundation of our hope in God. We dare not approach him but for this confidence. Without the knowledge of sin forgiven, where are we ? Or how can we advance a single step in the life of faith ? And if it is indeed so, as most surely it is, we have reason greatly to deplore, that the doctrine of the believer's justification in Christ, is so sparingly presented to him, and that it occupies so comparatively unimportant a place in the Christian ministry. Other truths are advanced whilst this is apparently forgotten ; other points are discussed, whilst this point remains unheeded. Or if it be adverted to, the doctrine is too often either mis-stated or but feebly delivered. Sometimes we are taught that all baptized persons, most of whom are apparently merely nominal Christians, have received remission of sins in virtue of Christ's death. But such statements as this bring no comfort to the sinner's heart. They tend to establish the false peace of the unawakened, but do not confirm the trembling believer's faith. To be told generally that the anger of God is remitted for Christ's sake, and that we are in such a condition of privilege as baptized persons ; also that we have no cause for fear, provided we live up to our Christian profession ; to be told, that God having for Jesus' sake put away his wrath, we may properly account ourselves his children, always with the provision that we do his will, and keep his commandments ; to be told this, and more to the same effect, is of no avail to the conscience-stricken soul, who needs not only a far stronger and a more unequivocal testimony, but an essentially different testimony concerning the redemption and grace that is in Christ Jesus. That remedial law, of which so many speak, is

not "the perfect law of liberty" which makes the believer free from the law of sin and death. (Rom. viii. 2. and James i. 25.) But it is the perfect law of liberty which the convinced sinner needs, and most anxiously does he seek to understand the nature of "the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," and the full import of those words of Jesus, "if the Son shall make you free, then are ye free indeed." The little children seek the children's bread, but stones are too often given them in its stead. (Luke xi. 11.) The crumbs that fall from the Master's table are the utmost that is vouchsafed them, and these they enjoy in common with the dogs, (Matt. xv. 27.) that is, with those who are in Scripture language, *without*, and not cleansed according to the cleansing of the sanctuary. (Rev. xxii. 15.) For it must be observed, and it is well worthy of remark, that a very large proportion of our professed teachers administer to the hearers, no more than scanty and imperfect fragments of Gospel truth, and that those fragments of truth are also given to all indiscriminately, no mention being made of *a peculiar people, who have received the right of becoming children of God*, and who as such are entitled to the children's bread, even to that Jesus, that bread from heaven, that true bread of life for whom their souls greatly hunger. The children ask for him, who is "made of God unto them, wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption." They say, "We would see Jesus." We would feed upon him by faith. We would fain hear that our sins are forgiven us for his name's sake. We have read in the Scriptures that it is so, but we desire to have the blessed truth unfolded to us by our teachers. We would know more about this matter. And shall any upbraid the children for this desire, for this longing of heart, for this hungering and

thirsting for a righteousness which they cannot find in themselves? Some dare to do this; but their Master has pronounced them blessed, and happily for them He has also promised, that they shall be filled. (Matt. v. 6.) And He has said to those whom he has espoused to himself, "I will give you pastors according to mine heart which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." (Jer. iii. 14, 15.) The full vision of faith may tarry, but it shall come in a time appointed. "It shall come and will not tarry." (Hab. ii. 3.) And if the outward ministry of the word be at any time defective, the Lord can speak to his people through other channels.

How worthy of admiration and adoring love is that manifold grace of God, which is so strikingly displayed in his providential dealings with his people, in reference to their instruction in "the truth as it is in Jesus." It may be, that they do not enjoy the advantage of an efficient living ministry. But this want is often supplied by the teaching of the faithful and gifted men "who being dead yet speak." Their tongues are silent in the grave, but the thoughts which they once expressed, remain for the instruction of the church. We possess them in the form of books, so that we still enjoy, according to the Lord's promise, pastors after his own heart, who feed us with knowledge and understanding. The incompetence of ignorant shepherds, is not however excused on this account. Thanks be to God, the sheep are fed, but the responsibility is equally great as it regards those, who undertake the pastoral office, and do not perform it. No thanks to them, that the Lord's people do not perish for lack of knowledge. The grace of Christ forbids this, not their zeal and faithfulness. Of such ignorant teachers it cannot even be said, that they are instructors of babes, (Rom. ii. 20.) or that

they possess so much as "the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law;" and how much less can it be truly said of them, that they hold fast that form of gospel truth and grace which came by Jesus Christ. Happily for us, however, the divine Saviour is not limited in the use of means. All power in heaven and earth is committed to him as Mediator; and "he is head over all things for his church." Whether there be prophecies, they may fail; whether there be tongues, they may cease; whether there be knowledge, it may vanish away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever, and cannot fail of its accomplishment. That word cannot fail, which forms a part of the Lord's covenant engagements to his church, as declared by the prophet Isaiah—"and all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children;" nor that additional promise delivered by evangelists as well as prophets; "and they shall not teach every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord: for all shall know me from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." Jer. xxxi. 34. and Heb. viii. 11, 12.

"I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father." How does the perusal of this epistle put to flight the vain pretensions of those nominal Christians, who know nothing of experimental religion, and how plainly are we here taught that there are experiences which are peculiar to the children of God. By some the fact is assumed, that all men are God's children, and that all may know, and ought to believe, that he is their Father. Now in a certain sense God may be considered the Father of all created beings, inasmuch as he is their author and first cause. But the

relationship of Father in an evangelical sense, is not accorded to men in their state of natural alienation from God. The privilege of being the children of God is connected with faith in Christ, for we read—"as many as received (or believed on) Him, to them gave he power, (right, or privilege) to become the sons of God;" and then we are also informed, that the persons who thus believe, and receive in connexion with their faith this adoption of sons, were previously born of the Spirit. (John i. 12, 13.) They had received from God the gift of a new nature; consequently they were not merely natural persons when they ventured to claim the privilege of their adoption into the family of their Father in heaven. That we are "by nature children of wrath," rather than children of God, is an important Scripture truth; and equally explicit is the declaration of the apostle Paul—"Ye are all the children of God *by faith in Christ Jesus*. (Gal. iii. 26.) The happy state of children must then be restricted to those who have faith—a living and true faith in Christ. For the nominal faith of baptism cannot by any possibility be substituted efficaciously in the place of that faith which is a fruit of the new birth. The nominal faith of the nominal believer introduces him into a state of nominal privilege. He calls God his Father; but not because he is one of the sons, into whose heart God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son, crying, "Abba, Father." Gal. iv. 6.) The adoption of a Son he considers his right as a baptized person, although the Spirit has as yet borne no inward testimony to the reality of the fact. (Rom. viii. 14—16.) But the children addressed by our Apostle "*have known the Father*." They have realized their adoption by the power of the Holy Ghost; for the love of God has been shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost given

unto them ; and this in connexion with their being previously justified by faith. (Rom. v. 1—5.) And these little children have been very far from arrogating to themselves a state not warranted by the word of God. It was in the Scripture that they discovered their own title to the adoption of sons. It was there that they saw themselves described as the very persons to whom the blessed privilege appertained. For they knew that they had come to God as aliens from his commonwealth, and had bewailed before him their lost condition. Conscience testified to their earnest cries for mercy ; but more than this, to their having sought this mercy in the name of Jesus. And as in the Scripture they had found that God would receive sinners into his favour, and would make with them an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, for his own name's sake, and the name's sake of Jesus ; so they were conscious that they had come in simple faith, pleading the Lord's promise, and beseeching him to ratify that word to them. How did their souls long to be interested in the inheritance of the saints ; and how earnestly did they pray that the children's bread might be given to their needy souls ! They did indeed perceive that they possessed no merits to recommend them to God's favour. They came to him "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." But by faith they discerned that their unworthiness was no disqualification for God's mercy in Christ Jesus ; rather they perceived that it was their qualification ; for of Jesus they read, "This man receiveth *sinners* and eateth *with them* ; and again, that "he came to seek and to save those that were lost," and "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." By means, therefore, of a divine logic, which enabled them to reason correctly from the twofold tes-

timony of the Scripture, and the experience of their own hearts, the little children assured themselves that they might without presumption account themselves believers. Nor did they err in that assumption, for the Holy Ghost also set his seal to the reality of their faith. The Holy Ghost imparted to them the filial spirit, and that love of God which is peculiar to the saints; a love intimately connected with faith and knowledge, and arising from a sense of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ: from a sense of that glory of God which is "his goodness." (Ex. xxxiii. 18, 19.)

It is of great importance to observe that our evangelist places a knowledge of the Father amongst the early experiences of the believer; and we may hence conclude, that this knowledge should be attained even by the babes in Christ, who are by no means warranted in supposing that so high an attainment is not for them. But may we not add, if they be indeed new-born babes, can they be satisfied without this knowledge of the Father? Impossible. Their restless souls must be disquieted, till they behold their Father's reconciled countenance. Till the Spirit whispers, God is thy Father, and thou, poor sinner, art his child, there can be no joy in God, no peace in believing. Till there is a clear evidence of faith, confirmed by the witness of the Spirit, that God is our God, all is comparatively dark and dreary in the soul. It is the knowledge of the Father that we first need. Nothing else will do but this. We would fain feel ourselves, wretched prodigals as we are, encircled in those paternal arms. That kiss of peace is what we desire. (Luke xv. 20.) To behold the dreaded frown of the justly offended parent, exchanged for the pity and love of a compassionate father, is the sight, the vision of faith, to which we anxiously

aspire. It must be so in the case of all born of the Spirit, for the new nature prompts us unceasingly to seek reunion with our Father in heaven.

Let all returning prodigals who are truly convinced of sin, and of their wretched state of spiritual destitution ; let all who are weary of feeding upon the poor husks of worldly vanities, turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, nothing doubting of his fatherly love and willingness to receive all who come to him in the prevailing name of Jesus. It was the simple childlike faith of the little children addressed by our apostle, which obtained for them that knowledge of the Father, of which he speaks. Faith introduced them to that knowledge, and faith will introduce other poor prodigals into the same knowledge. Surely the little children named in our text, had received the gift of faith, or they had not thus known the Father. And what did their faith suggest to them ? To look at themselves only, and at their own death in sin ? At God's law only, and at all its terrors armed against themselves ? And at the divine justice engaged to punish the transgressors ? This was not all that faith led them to behold. It directed them to the sure word of promise. It pointed to covenant engagements entered into by the Father with his beloved and co-equal Son ; and to a heavenly testament sealed with the blood of the divine testator. And thus did faith instruct the newly-awakened soul. Believe only on this record, for God is faithful to his word. He cannot deny himself. He has sworn by his holiness, that he will not fail the spiritual David. Thou art a sinner fleeing from the wrath to come, to lay hold upon the hope set before thee in the gospel. Then this strong consolation is for thee, for God has confirmed his promise by an oath : only believe, and thou shalt be estab-

lished. Do not stagger at the promise of God through unbelief. Be strong in faith, and give glory to God. Take him at his word. It is not the word of a man that may lie or repent: with God is no variableness nor shadow of turning; he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Before the foundation of the world, he decreed the salvation of an elect people, and now he is accomplishing that ancient decree. It is in part fulfilled, for Jesus has made an end of sin for his people, and has brought in an everlasting righteousness. All that remains, is that this salvation should be applied to the hearts of those who are ordained to life eternal. Nor question whether *thou* art perchance not so ordained, for the fact of thy willingness to drink of the water of life, affords a good hope that thou hast already been made thus willing in the day of God's power. Fear not, therefore, but "by prayer and supplication, make known thy requests unto God." "He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him," and he has said, "the diligent soul shall be made rich." Then "follow on to know the Lord." "Cry after knowledge, and lift up thy voice for understanding. Seek her as silver; search for her as for hid treasures. Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God:" Thou shalt know the Father.

With what intense anxiety do the babes in Christ press on for the knowledge of the Father. Again and again they repeat the words of our evangelist, "Shew us the Father and it sufficeth us." And at last they obtain the desired knowledge. Jesus reveals the Father to them. (Matt. xi. 27.) It is to Jesus they are indebted for this vision of faith; for "no man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." "All things are delivered unto

me of my Father," says Jesus; and amongst other things, this knowledge of a reconciled God is committed to Christ, and is dispensed by him to his believing people. But it may be, the little children are very ignorant at the time, of the full extent of their obligations to him, "who is head over all things to his church." They receive the gift of this divine knowledge, and they rejoice in its possession; also they return God thanks for the same; but they are not duly aware, that the same hand which was once nailed for them to the accursed tree, is now stretched out from heaven with this precious gift. Afterwards they learn that Jesus is the medium of all blessings, and that no good or perfect gift comes from above, except it come through him.

How greatly do the little children rejoice, when God is made known to them as their Father, and when the Spirit of God witnesses with their spirits, that they are indeed his children by adoption and grace. The knowledge that an evangelist desired, they have obtained. (John xiv. 8.) And how lovely is the Father in their eyes. What a perfect God does he now appear; "the God of peace; the Father of mercies, and God of all consolation." His attributes of tender mercy, of boundless pity, of inexhaustible goodness, of loving-kindness, exceeding the limit of their thoughts, form the subject of their meditations. And from these views of the blessed God, what deep self-abasement and self-loathing springs up within their souls. Before they knew God as a Father, they feared and hated sin, because they perceived that it had been their ruin. Now they hate it more exceedingly, because by its commission God is injured, and his benign majesty insulted. A principle of self-love first urged them to flee from the wrath to come. They discerned that their own souls were in

peril, except they “ fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them in the gospel,” But now more generous principles animate their hearts. Not that the self-love which excited them to flee from the everlasting wrath of God, was by any means improper ; far from it. It was by the command of God himself, and by an operation of his grace that they became thus careful for themselves. But their personal safety being secured, they are put in possession of new feelings, new desires, new affections. Now commences the godly sorrow for sin, which is connected with loving much, because much has been forgiven. Now, in the quiet peace and rest of the soul, there is a capability for rightly contemplating their God *as love*. This could not be done before, when he appeared to the soul as a righteous God, angry with sinners. Then the trembling criminal found himself sufficiently occupied in escaping from the avenger of blood. The city of refuge had yet to be entered ; he had yet to receive the assurance of his pardon. But now he is within the bulwarks which secure his safety, and he has received the remission of sin for the name’s sake of Jesus. By faith he has entered into rest ; (Heb. iv. 3.) into that rest of Christ of which it is said, “ it shall be glorious.” (Isaiah xi. 10.) Now the spirit of glory and of God rests upon him, (1 Peter iv. 14,) and in and through that spirit of Christ, he contemplates with open face the glory of the Lord. The Father is revealed. He is manifested to the soul, as a God perfectly reconciled to the believing sinner. And hence the joyful exclamation of the church, “ Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not ; thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer.”

It is thus by an inward experience of faith, and of

the sealing of the Spirit, (Eph. i. 13, 14.) that the little children know in whom they have believed, and are assured that their pretensions to the grace of adoption are not unfounded. Consequently, they are invulnerable to the scoffing doubts of unbelievers, and of merely nominal professors, the "Israel after the flesh," who boast that they are the seed of Abraham, but prove themselves by their works to be Ishmaelites, and the children of the bond-woman. For they persecute those who are born of the Spirit, into whose hearts God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son, (Gal. iv. 6.) and cast out their names as evil. The fact of their having received the adoption of sons by a peculiar operation of divine grace, and by a peculiar testimony of the Spirit, they account to be enthusiasm. If, say they, you are the children of God, so are we; were we not baptized? Are we not believers? partakers of the same faith, the same sacraments, and receiving in common with yourselves the same external marks of the divine favour, those external marks, which are the sure signs and pledges of an inward and spiritual grace bestowed upon our souls? If you know the Father, do not we also know the Father? Why arrogate to yourselves alone, a species of knowledge which all baptised persons ought to possess: a species of knowledge which we must in charity suppose that all do possess, provided that they exhibit a due respect to the ordinances of the church, and claim the common privilege of their adoption into the household of faith? But let us be permitted to observe, in spite of all the objections of the Israel after the flesh, that spiritually to know the Father, is not without exception the heritage of all baptised persons. Truly the apostle John meant far more by his address to the little children, than the carnal worshippers imagine,

when they vainly claim for all alike, the high and peculiar privilege of the knowledge of the Father. The baptism of water is not necessarily connected with this knowledge, nor will any ceremonial ordinance ensure its acquisition. It is connected with the baptism of the Spirit, and with the new birth, and faith in Jesus ; but above all, it is itself a heavenly gift, and vouchsafed of God's grace, irrespective of any works, either ceremonial or of any other kind, wrought in order to obtain it. It is an evidence of effectual calling and electing love. It is the Spirit's seal in the heart, to the reality of gospel faith. It is the Spirit's witness that our faith in Jesus is not in vain or delusive. It is the divine assurance to our souls, that we are individually and personally the objects of the love of God. It is the testimony of the Holy Ghost, that Jesus " loved *me* and gave himself for *me* ;" that the Father of the Lord Jesus is *my* father, in a distinct and peculiar sense ; that *I* am his child, and that I may henceforth plead confidently the new relation into which he has himself introduced me by his free grace and favour.

Happy the souls who know the Father ; for to know the Father, is to love the Father, to approve his will, to delight in his law, to submit ourselves to all his righteous judgments, and to rejoice in the undoubted equity of his administration. To know the Father, is to account that he does all things well, and to find this conviction a sweet solace whilst passing through the vanity of the present life. Surely there is in the hearts of those who know the Father, a flame of divine love enkindled, which enables them to say, " Thy will be done ! " although that will may be grievous to the flesh. It is the knowledge of the Father which fills the soul of the new convert with unutterable joy. To know that the

blessed God is his God, his Father, and to be able to repose peaceably in the contemplation of all his divine attributes, as friendly to himself, this it is that brings into his heart a tide of bliss unspeakable.

Do we wonder at this high knowledge vouchsafed to babes? are we ready to say, is this indeed the privilege of those who are commencing the life of faith? Is it not probable that such a rich experience, is the result of lengthened years of patient industry, and of faithful and laborious walking in the Christian course? These novices have wrought but one hour; surely the revelation of the Father will be reserved for those who have borne the burthen and heat of the day. The apostle's appeal to the experience of the little children, puts to flight all these legal objections and surmises of the carnal mind. Also the fallacy of such reasoning is shown at once, if we consider why it is, that a gracious Saviour thus carries the lambs in his bosom, unveiling to them the Father's face. For, but for those first cordials thus supplied, how would the little children be strengthened to run the race set before them; how become nerved for the good fight of faith, in which it behoves them to be "more than conquerors"? But for the precious knowledge of the Father, so graciously vouchsafed to the youthful warriors, surely they would shun the alarm of war, and prove recreants in the very outset of the battle. But now "having for an helmet the hope of salvation," and being girded by God himself with the strength arising from the assurance of his loving-kindness, they confidently exclaim; "Jehovah is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear; Jehovah is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident:

for in the time of trouble, he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me upon a rock, and my head shall be lifted up above mine enemies round about me." And in like manner the knowledge of the Father is to the little children that "preparation of the gospel of peace," by which their feet are shod to run the race set before them. Here we recognize the fulfilment of the precious promise, "And he shall dip his foot in oil:" "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy day, so shall thy strength be." (Deut. xxxiii. 24.)

The little children are enlisted as the pilgrim warriors of the Lord Jesus, who first prepares them for the services they are to perform, and the trials they are to encounter. Now without the knowledge of the Father, and the conscious possession of the spirit of adoption, where is that "joy of the Lord" which is "our strength?" (Neh. viii. 10.) And how fulfil the exhortation, "earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints," (Jude 3.) except we first know that we are justified by that faith, and that its possession is the pledge of our eternal life in Christ? Truly the experiences which some account to be superfluous and enthusiastic, cannot be dispensed with by the youthful candidates for immortal honours. They are aware themselves of their value, and greatly rejoice in their possession. And it may be, that when the little children are advanced to the stature of young men in Christ, they will sometimes look back with fond regret upon their happy state of childhood, saying with Job, "Oh that it were with me as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness; as I was in the day of my youth, when the secret of God was

upon my tabernacle, when I washed my steps in butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil." When the sensible experiences with which it pleases God to favour the little children, are in a measure withdrawn, and the mature of age are required to walk for a season more entirely by faith upon the word of God, then do they look back upon their former manifestations, and entreat the Lord to visit them with the same. But they know not that there is a need for their being in heaviness through manifold temptations, in order "that the trial of their faith, which is more precious than gold, may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." It is through much tribulation we are to enter the kingdom of God ; and the trial of faith constitutes this tribulation, which is of a kind far different from the ordinary sorrows to which flesh is heir. But the work of purification being in a good measure completed, the believer shall come forth as gold. And then we have ground for expecting that his latter end shall be more blessed than his beginning, (Job xlii. 12.) and that the exhortation of the prophets shall be found very applicable to the experience of his soul : "Be glad, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God : for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain and the latter rain." (Joel ii. 23.) A precious promise this, of a faithful God, to whom the young men in Christ may properly look for its accomplishment, when, lamenting, it may be, the former showers of blessing, they are ready to ask, why the Lord has led them out into a waste and howling wilderness where no water is. (Deut. x. 15, 16.) And when tempted to make this inquiry, let them also remember, that the Scripture affords them a sweet

answer of peace, a blessed assurance that the Lord has an especial purpose of mercy in view, which is even this, "that he may do them good in their latter end." (Deut. x. 16.) Then blessed, thrice blessed the hope of the believing soul. For a season it may be permitted to lament, like to a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth, (Joel i. 8,) but the sorrow shall endure but for a night, and joy cometh in the morning. The former rain and the latter rain, (such is the tenor of the promise,) shall be the believer's happy portion. His former experience shall be renewed, but also, a new light of salvation shall break in upon his soul. Not only shall he again with unveiled face behold the Father, (the veil that temptation had interposed being removed,) but he shall know him far more perfectly than before. For now he shall discover far more accurately the nature of the Father's love in Christ. He before enjoyed a sweet child-like confidence in the paternal love of his reconciled God, and knew the Father by the intuition of faith. But now he has received in addition to his faith, knowledge, (2 Peter i. 3, 5.) a knowledge which discloses to him that eternal counsel of the Father's love, by which his calling and election are made sure. Therefore his views become greatly expanded; and whereas he formerly loved his God from a *feeling* perception of his glory, now in addition to that first experience, he possesses an *understanding* perception of his glory, and loves his heavenly Father with enlarged affections, and with the mind and strength, as perfectly as with the heart. And in reference to that day, it may be said of the believer's soul, "the floor shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil:" and then shall be restored the years that the locusts had eaten, the canker-worm, and the caterpillar, and the palmer

worm, the great army of the Lord of hosts ; and he shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord his God, who hath dealt wondrously with him : " (Joel) and then shall be fulfilled the oft-repeated promise ; and " my people shall never be ashamed." "The husbandman shall no more be ashamed, nor the vine-dressers, because the vine is dried up, and the fig-tree languisheth ; for again it shall be said, the tree beareth, the fig-tree and the vine do yield their strength." (Joel iv.) Even so, for the promise shall be found sure to all the spiritual seed ; and the little children, first rejoicing in the light, and then it may be for a season in their estate of manhood walking in comparative gloom, shall yet be able to attest that the light of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

" *I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one ;*" and again in ver. 14, "*I have written unto you young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.*" The little children are carried for a season in the Saviour's bosom. In that resting-place the tender lambs are nurtured, and fain would they remain in the same blessed position. But this is not according to the counsel of the all-wise God. These little ones are to learn to " endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." (2 Tim. ii. 3.) So the Lord has decreed ; for they must be in all things conformed to the Captain of their Salvation. Therefore in due time they are led forth of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil ; (Matt. iv. 1,) all their previous experiences of grace, and manifestations of the Father's love, being in conformity with those higher and more perfect manifestations, which were made to Jesus, as the first-born

amongst many brethren, when upon his baptism of the Holy Ghost, a voice from the excellent glory proclaimed him to be the beloved Son of God, in whom the Father was well pleased. The like attestation had attended the heavenly baptism of these little children, only with this material difference; that the Father was well-pleased with their forerunner in his own person, and for his own works' sake; but with them as "accepted in the beloved," and adorned with his righteousness. And now, baptized with the Spirit, and conscious of the divine favour, the young men in Christ commence the good fight of faith. For although, properly speaking, the warfare began when faith first dawned in their hearts, and above all, when it prevailed to make their justification perfect, still the trial of faith is always adverted to in Scripture, as a series of conflicts succeeding to the justification of the believer, rather than preceding it. Many are the trials of the righteous upon his first coming to the Father in the name of Jesus, but the fiery trial of faith appears to be an after work, which is carried on in the believer's soul for various important ends; amongst which ends we must suppose a main one to be, the bruising of Satan beneath those feet, which are now "shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." The language of Scripture is indeed most explicit as to the nature of the Christian warfare, when it declares it to be carried on not against flesh and blood, but against powers, against principalities, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places, (Eph. vi. 12.) against that malignant spirit, who as our chief adversary, is distinctly pointed out in very many places of holy writ. The fact is undoubted, that as the Captain of our Salvation entered the lists with the God of this world, and overcame him

on our behalf, so every individual believer in his own person and in the strength of the Spirit of Jesus is to overcome the same wily adversary. The Apostle John has this truth in his mind, in the verses before us ; for he says to the young men, "*Ye have overcome the wicked one,*" evidently meaning by that appellation, the same potent being called elsewhere the Devil, Satan, the Serpent, the accuser of the brethren, the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. But in presenting this view, which is strictly scriptural, we are reminded that it is unpopular with very many, who in some respects appear to be students of the word of God. The distinct agency of Satan, as the adversary of the saints, if not questioned or opposed, is at least overlooked and passed over in silence. But how is this, for the Scripture is most explicit on the point in question ? Again and again the sacred oracles bear testimony to the awful fact, that there is a spiritual potentate amidst the apostate creation of God, who contests with the Most High the sovereignty of the human heart, and who in a peculiar manner pursues with enmity the people who are snatched as brands from the burning, by the strong hand of an omnipotent Saviour. This truth then must be maintained, however obnoxious it may be to the contempt of modern philosophy. If its belief exposes the Christian to the charge of childish superstition, he will do well to remember, that no one doctrine of his faith will approve itself to the carnal reason of man ; all is alike irrational, all is folly to those despisers who "wonder and perish." But truly, every part of our Scripture faith is so linked together, and all its truths so mutually interwoven, that they cannot be separated. The rejection of any one truth of Scripture is virtually

to reject all that we profess to believe. And this is most especially the case, if the obnoxious truth be one of main importance ; if it be one which, severed from the rest, leaves the Scripture mutilated in no ordinary degree. Now the believer who is taught by the word and Spirit of God, is not only aware of the doctrine of Scripture in regard to the fearful agency of the Spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience, he has also been made conscious in the experience of his own soul, that there is indeed such an adversary as the Scripture describes, who would fain, if he could, pluck him out of the hand of the Father and the Son. The believer then, thus instructed by the twofold testimony of the Scripture, and his own experience, will not fear to declare the whole truth in this matter, as in all others. Let us inquire then by the aid of this twofold light, more particularly into the nature of that warfare which the God of this world ceases not to wage against the anointed champions of the Lord. Now the persecution and tribulation which arise because of the word, (Matt. xiii. 21.) may be traced at once to that enmity of the serpent, which he infuses into the hearts of his seed. The Scripture testifies, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution ;" and the believer finds it to be so from the very outset of his Christian course. Very soon a divided house and family give powerful meaning to those memorable words of Jesus, (Matt. x. 34, 35, 36.) "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth ; I came not to send peace, but a sword." For Jesus came "to set a man at variance against his Father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be those of his own household." On earth, properly speaking, Jesus gives no peace, but his doctrine brings with

it a sword. "In me," says Jesus, on another occasion to his disciples, "ye shall have peace ; but in the world tribulation." The kingdom of God and of his Christ is a kingdom of peace in the Holy Ghost, but it is only this to the inhabitants of that kingdom, and to them it is only this in the inner man, and by faith. Meanwhile, the supposed lofty pretensions of the heirs of the kingdom which cannot be moved, excite the disgust of those around them, and this aversion is inflamed by "the Spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Soon the believer finds himself reviled for his new faith ; and he is asked in derision, from whence is this new light, which enables him to discern that all men save himself and a few special favourites of heaven, are under the wrath of God. His explanations from the scripture find him no favour with his adversaries. His supposed arrogance is so galling to their pride of heart, that although he is ready to give a reason of the hope that is in him with meekness and fear, this is not permitted. It is enough that the young convert has assumed the position of one wiser than his teachers, and vainly as it regards them, does he appeal to God as the author of his knowledge, saying with the Psalmist, (Psalm cxix. 99, 100.) "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts." And now commences the severe trial of the believer's faith. Does he love father or mother, wife or child, more than Christ ? and is he prepared to lose his life for Jesus' sake, that he may find it in a higher and a better sense ? To the first inquiry he gives a decided negative. To the second an equally distinct affirmative. To Jesus he appeals, "Lord ! thou knowest that I love thee." Natural affections do in a

measure influence my heart, but thou art loved more than any of the objects for which they plead. And in regard to my life; O Jesus, claim it, secure it for thyself; I am altogether willing to resign it to thee; do with me what thou wilt; give me, take from me what thou wilt: only I plead for the possession of thyself, and of thy Spirit, and for the Father's love in thee. In renouncing my own life, I claim thy most gracious promise, that I shall find it again in thee. And from the believer's readiness to endure, if need be, the loss of all things, that he may win Christ and be found in him, the reality of his faith is proved; for his alacrity of spirit, and devotedness of purpose are unfeigned. It is with full purpose of heart, and with the entire judgment of his mind that he counts the cost, and then in spirit before his God, parts with all, that he may buy the pearl of inestimable price. The Lord is his witness, that he has chosen God as his portion, and has been deliberately willing "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." The Holy Ghost is his witness, that "he has esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, having had respect unto the recompence of reward." Now these experiences of the believer constitute a part of the trial of his faith. The god of this world terribly threatens him with the loss of earthly affections, with the contempt of relations, with the aversion of friends. He will be no more loved and honoured as before. His name will be cast out as evil. He shall be numbered with the people who dwell alone, (Deut. xxiii. 9.) and who are not reckoned among the nations. Cut off from the endearments of natural affection, and persecuted in the house of his friends, how sad will be his lot. Subject to the continual strife of those

tongues which are as sharp swords, and to the bitter words, which are as arrows dipt in venom, how sorely will he be shot at by the archers, and mourn because of the oppression of the enemy. (Psalm xlii. 9, 10 ; xli. 5, &c. xxxv. 11, &c. lv. 21 ; lvii. 4, &c.) The reality of these evils when they take place is indeed a painful suffering, and Satan would have it so : but he cannot by their infliction induce the believer to relinquish his hold of Christ, or to part with his birth-right for a mess of pottage. Neither the smiles and promises of the world on the one hand, nor its hatred on the other, can prevail on him to change the tenour of his heavenly course. He has put his hand to the plough, and he does not look back ; but rather looking unto Jesus, who for his sake endured the cross, despising the shame, he follows the track of his beloved Master's steps, and runs with patience the race set before him in the gospel.

If the persecution and tribulation which arise because of the word, fail to check the believer's ardour ; if, as is often the case, Satan finds to his discomfiture, that it is rather increased by opposition, and that no other end but the gratification of his own malice has been gained, (a species of triumph for which he will eventually suffer by the increase of his own pains,) he will then have recourse to other modes of attack. His hatred against the saints is insatiable ; it pursues them unto death, nor can be satisfied without a constant attempt upon the precious life of their souls. And this life has withstood the assaults of his open rage, expressed in the words and actions of his emissaries ; will it now with equal success repel the wiles of the tempter, when he no longer appears as the Dragon breathing out threatenings and slaughter, (Rev. xii. &c.) but is transformed into an angel of light ; when he is no more seen as " the

roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," but is apparently a zealous friend to holiness and truth? The issue of the conflict is not doubtful, for the battle has been won already by the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Again, it is to be fought by the believer in his own person, and it may be he will experience a momentary defeat. He may be circumvented by the wiles of the crafty foe, but not eventually overcome; for if it may at any time be said of the believer, "a troop has overcome him," we must not forget to add the scripture promise in connexion with that discomfiture, "but he shall overcome at the last." (Gen. xlix. 19.) Assuredly then the tried believer shall come forth as gold: not indeed as though he had no dross to purge away, for his corrupt nature mingles much alloy with the precious gift of faith, and this impurity is manifested, whilst the indestructible metal is subjected to that refining fire, which insures the increase of its purity and lustre.

The spirit that by nature rules in the human heart, and leads it captive at his will, cannot be a stranger to its desires and tendencies. He cannot be ignorant of its most vulnerable parts, of its liabilities to peculiar forms of temptation, and how to administer these temptations with the best chance of success. And he is aware that although the believer is sanctified by grace, and his heart purified by faith, there are still within that heart latent sparks of an unholy fire, which may so kindle into flame, as to go near to consume his precious life. But the new convert, who has so recently enjoyed the smiles of his Father's face, and has been partaking of all the plenty of his house, cannot be very readily beguiled by the proffer of temporal good things. The arch-traitor is conscious of this. He beholds the

young men in Christ prepared to endure hardness as good soldiers of the cross. They have already evinced their proficiency in the school of self-denial. But was that self-denial as perfect as it should be? Here the adversary and accuser of the brethren perceives a flaw. Did not self-complacency mingle with that self-denial? or, if it did not, might it not be infused into the hearts of those new converts? Might not spiritual pride be excited, so that the work of self might be more admired than the work of Jesus? Satan resolves to make the attempt; and here he too often succeeds. For he insinuates into their minds, much satisfaction at their own spiritual attainments. He whispers to their hearts; 'from whence this zeal and faithfulness; from whence this ability to run in the way of God's commandments? Others appear to linger in the way, but already they approach the heavenly Canaan! And did they not owe this power of vigorous obedience in part at least to themselves? Had not their faithful improvement of one talent procured for them other five; and was not their fidelity to grace received well pleasing in God's sight, and continually ensuring for them still larger measures of that grace?' Such were the reasonings of the wily serpent, and by these insinuations the purity of the virgin hearts of the believers was sullied. (2 Cor. ii. &c.) For they began to imagine that they had something of merit in themselves, something of holiness in themselves, tending to secure for them the approbation of their heavenly father. They knew not that they stood at all times "accepted in the Beloved;" and that their power of obedience was altogether a divine gift, bestowed by that same Jesus, with whom their ill-advised spirits were disposed to share the honour of their triumphs. Alas, how much subsequent evil did their

sad error cost them! They must now be humbled, and proved, and shewn what is in their hearts. The deep corruption of their nature must be disclosed to them in all its black malignity. Their own miserable weakness, and emptiness, and nothingness must be revealed, in order that Jesus may be discovered to be all in all. This last is the point to which the Lord is leading all believers. And the discovery of our own impotency, and of his fulness, is the true preparation of heart, which shall at last issue in the heavenly worship described by our evangelist, when in vision he beheld the elders "cast their crowns before the throne of God, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they were and are created." (Rev. iv. 10, 11.)

How subtle a sin is self-righteousness in the heart of the believer! It lodges there under the specious guise of holiness. This the individual is not conscious of at the time. He knows not that there is a traitor feeling in his heart, prompting him, not only to forbear casting his own crown before the Lord, but even disposing him with sacrilegious hands to rob Christ of his. In his more matured experience, the believer becomes conscious that it is so, and confesses that he has been slow to learn, that salvation is irrespective of the creature's desert, and takes place in every case, "according to the good pleasure of his Father's will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." (Eph. i. 5, 6.) The believer at first finds it difficult to admit that his self-righteousness and self-complacency rob God of his glory; and for a time he even suspects the teachers who insist much upon this point. He does not, it is

true, comprehend their meaning, but he supposes that their labour might be better employed, if it were bestowed upon other matters. If, says he, the opposers of self-righteousness would insist more upon personal holiness, they would do well. Why enlarge so much on the imputed righteousness of Christ? Is not the righteousness which is wrought within our souls by God's most holy Spirit, a matter of still greater importance? To the well instructed believer, these enquiries sound indeed harshly: they jar, and vibrate a most displeasing discord to his spiritual ear. And yet he may perhaps recollect the time when his own heart could suggest questions which savoured most imperfectly of the wisdom which is from above, and which gave but feeble evidence of the teaching of that Spirit, whose most essential office it is, to take *of the things of Christ*, and show *them* unto us. "He shall glorify *me*," says Jesus; not his own work in your hearts, however excellent, but *me*. "He shall take of *mine*, and show it unto you." He shall discover to you, not your own righteousness, wrought by his aid, but "*mine*;" my righteousness, which I bring near, (Isaiah xli. 13.) and "which is unto all and upon all them that believe." (John xvi. 14, 15, and Rom. iii. 22.) Truly, to the novice, who has not yet been led into the dark chambers of imagery, which occupy some of the recesses of his fallen heart, it appears strange, and unjust, that he should be accused of any attempt to rob the blessed Jesus of one at least of his many crowns. But as before observed, his after experiences may convince him, that his teachers did not wantonly or ignorantly tax him with error. When he is more fully acquainted with the plague of his own heart, and shall know his own sore and his own grief, (2 Chron. vi. 29, and

1 Kings viii. 38,) he will discover his propensity to magnify self, and his comparative indifference about the glory of God and the honour of his Lord. For, happily for his children, God will have them know that they are saved, not according to their works, but "according to his own purpose and grace which was given them, in Christ Jesus, before the world began." (2 Tim. i. 9.) And therefore if not adequately convinced of sin upon their first conversion to himself, which is the case with very many of his people, he permits them to discover afterwards how frail they are, and how imperfect is their life and conversation, although conducted upon evangelical principles, and carried on under the guidance and by the help of the Spirit of God : a spiritual discipline, which tends always "to the pulling down of strong holds ; the casting down of imaginations, and of every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God." (2 Cor. x. 5.)

The young men in Christ are indeed "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," but in themselves how weak and powerless ! Let the Lord cease for a moment to sustain them in the battle, and where are these warriors ? They are presently discomfited ; they are surprised by an ambush of the enemy ; their crafty foe has come upon them unawares, they are taken at a disadvantage, lost, disgraced, but for the timely rescue of that arm, which, when invoked, fails not to put to flight the armies of the aliens. Oh sovereign love, free and immutable, it is by thy grace we stand, and by thy grace that we arise again when we are fallen ! To humble us, and to prove us, thou dost oftentimes permit us to be shorn of the locks which thou gavest us for beauty and for strength. But again they grow at thy command, and

then it is, that our youth is renewed as the eagle's, and we mount up as on eagle's wings, and beholding thy glory, perceive and acknowledge that it will not admit of any admixture with the glory of the creature; and so we learn, that he that glorieth, must glory only in the Lord. (1 Cor. i. 31.)

The experience of the believer is ever tending to one point, which is this; his establishment in "the doctrine of Christ." (2 John 9.) Truly, from the first dawning of faith in his heart, Jesus was known to be the only way to the Father, and God was approached only in and through his Son. But yet, Jesus was most imperfectly known, and most imperfectly acknowledged. Nor could it be otherwise. It is during the exercises and trials of the life of faith, that the nature and offices and work of Christ, are fully discovered and appreciated. And hence the necessity of these trials. But for them, the soul would remain very ignorant of the glory of the divine Mediator. That glory, as before observed, is in a measure apprehended, when the convinced sinner, fleeing from the wrath to come, discovers that Jesus is the way to the Father, and that no man cometh unto the Father but by him. But the returning sinner's justification being secured, and his present peace with God fully established, how shall he understand rightly, or duly value, the nature of Christ's priesthood, and continual intercession for him at God's right hand, except he first discovers that he has need of that continual intercession? This he does discover in the course of his Christian warfare. When he wrestles with powers and principalities, with the rulers of the darkness of this world, it is clearly revealed to him, that he can only stand against the wiles of the devil, in virtue of the intercession of that

Saviour, who in the hour of need whispers to his heart, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith should not fail." It is in the hour of temptation, and when the believer is ready to fall before his powerful adversary, that Christ discovers himself to the tried soul, as one, "who ever liveth to make intercession for him."

It may be that Satan has desired to have the believer that he may sift him as wheat, (Luke xxii. 31.) and that the Lord has acceded to the trial of his servant. But then it is, that Christ interposes with this word of consolation. "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by my name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the water, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." When justified by faith, the believer supposed that all that remained for him to do, was to glorify God by a life becoming the gospel. He knew not that he was also to grow into the knowledge of Christ; to become rooted and grounded in his love, and to be made able "to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." (Eph. iii. 17—19.) In the course of his varied trials, the love of Jesus is more abundantly revealed to him, and the prayer, which after the apostolic model, and under the teaching of the word and Spirit of God, he offered up not fully conscious of its meaning, is now answered, in the experience of his own heart, where Christ dwells, by a more enlightened and more loving faith. (Eph. iii. 14—19.)

"*And the word of God abideth in you.*" Our Apostle points out in these words, the practical cause of the

enduring strength and final victory of the champions of Christ. He had just said, "*ye are strong*," and then he adds immediately, "*the word of God abideth in you*." As much as to say, observe from whence it is that you derive your strength, and learn from hence the importance of continuing to comply with the Scripture admonition, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom," that word being spirit and life in the believer's heart. Should any desire to interpret the phrase, "*the word of God*," in the passage before us, mystically, as expressing Christ who is himself the Word, (John i. 1, &c.) and who himself dwells in the believer's heart by faith, such a meaning is obviously true, for it is only, properly speaking, by our union with Jesus that the life of faith is maintained. But although such a view is in itself correct, and cannot be too much insisted on, it is probable that our apostle refers rather to that word of Christ's testimony of which mention is made in Rev. xii. 11, when the Church triumphant is described as having overcome the accuser of the brethren by the power of that word. And in this sense, the word of God in our text, is that sword of the Spirit spoken of in Eph. vi. 17, by means of which the believer carries on a vigorous warfare against the powers of darkness: "the word of God is that sword which is quick and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Heb. iv. 12.) And will not the believer acquiesce in every statement which duly magnifies the excellence of the word of God? He cannot fail to do this; for it lays open to him his own heart; it leads him into the chambers of imagery that are

within his fallen soul. (Ezek. viii.) By this word also, he detects the wiles of the devil, and learns how to resist him. No wonder that we should hear him say with his teacher David, "I have hid thy word in my heart, that I should not sin against thee." He knows that no other word discovers sin, and discloses the way of righteousness. Never do the Church militant loosen their hold of those statutes of God which are their songs in the house of their pilgrimage. (Ps. cxix. 54.) By means of them they are able to sing the Lord's song in a strange land; and again and again to resume the harps, which for a moment they have been tempted, it may be, to hang upon the willows. In an enemy's country, encompassed with crafty foes, and in continual peril from their assaults, there is one invaluable possession which they will risk all to retain. The spoiling of their goods they take joyfully, (Heb. x. 34,) but from the word of God they will not part, save with their earthly life. Happily the power of mortal man does not suffice to pluck from the believer that word of God, which from the hand or mouth, has passed into the heart. (Rom. x. 8.) Let the word of God have become in any case "the engrafted word," (James i. 21.) and the child of God cannot lose it. The external record may be forcibly taken from him, but if its words of spirit and of life have been inscribed in living characters within his soul, he cannot perish for lack of knowledge, for he possesses "the incorruptible seed of the word of God, which liveth and endureth for ever." (1 Peter i. 23.) The believer then, with the faith and knowledge of Christ in his heart, can, as far as his salvation is concerned, dispense even with the letter of the Scripture. But conscious as he may be of this fact, his value for the written word is not thereby

diminished. For to him it is no dead letter, but the continual ministration of the Spirit; it is a word ever pregnant with fresh life. Follow the believer in his meditations of the word, and then say whether he does not live by every *written* word proceeding from the mouth of God. How greatly does he prize the sacred oracles: how constantly does he peruse their contents. Every promise of Scripture is to his faith a sure word of promise, and he thinks that he cannot too often review the title-deeds of his inheritance. And if he is in any difficulty, in any trial or temptation, then we hear him ask, What does the Lord say concerning me? Communing with himself, whilst preparing to take counsel of God's word, he thus speaks: "Unworthy as I am, and less than the least of all saints, I have yet made a covenant with the Lord by sacrifice." (Ps. l. 50.) I have laid hold on his strength; I have come to him through the blood of Jesus. And now "I am in trouble; I am oppressed; I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me; for mine enemies are lively, and they are strong, and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied." And for such a sufferer, conscious of the fact of his personal adoption into the family of God, how sweet, how incalculably blessed a promise stands recorded on the inspired page; "Call upon me in the day of trouble; *I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*" A promise this, upon which the soul may well rely, so as to act faith in God's mercy; upon which confiding, it shall surely obtain the wished-for deliverance. Again we behold the believer in heaviness through manifold temptations. Behind him are enemies who threaten his destruction; before him, the waves which threaten to devour. (Exod. xiv. 9.) But what says the Lord? Has he not given a word of

promise for the hour of need, a word of sure and certain hope upon which the tried soul may rely with confidence? Most certainly he has done this, and the believer is again saved by hope ; by a hope which does not, which cannot make ashamed, because it rests on the unchanging word of an unchanging God. And now let the Scripture speak for itself to the tried Christian, and let him say, whether the rod and staff of God's most holy word is not well calculated to be the unfailing strength and comfort of his soul. " There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man : but God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able to bear, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it." And this promise is not given only : it is fulfilled. The believer can attest that it is so, for he has proved the fidelity of his God in this very promise.

It is also in the course of the Christian's spiritual warfare, that he discovers the divine efficacy of that word of the Lord which is as a fire, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces. (Jer. xxiii. 29.) For the uses supplied by this blessed word are various. It contains exceeding great and precious promises for the support of the tried and afflicted soul. It points out a way of escape in every exigency, a refuge in every hour of need. But this word of God does not only furnish the believer with the joyful doctrine of his complete redemption in Christ ; it does not only discover to him the vast extent of that fatherly love of God, in which he may fully and boldly confide ; it also provides him with weapons mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong-holds, to the casting down of imaginations, and of every thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge

of God, assisting him to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. For, alas, the fleshly nature still needs destruction, the believer's soul being only partially renewed by grace. The flesh still lusteth against the spirit; it is still contrary to it. (Gal. v. 17.) There is a body of sin and death still allied to the regenerate spirit, which from time to time puts forth its carnal enmity, and even its daring blasphemies against the mighty and blessed God. This body of sin, this hateful malefactor, is indeed nailed to the cross, and so in a certain sense is properly considered dead. (Rom. vi. 2, 5—7, 11.) But yet it is also true, that the principle of sin is not extinguished, and that whilst it retains a power of expressing enmity to Jesus, it must be opposed by the word of the believer's testimony. (Luke xxiii. 39—41.) And having adverted to the apostolic symbols of the crucifixion of the old man, does not the Christian's experience unfold to him the truth of the emblem; the fact, that he is more closely united to the blaspheming malefactor than he could wish, and also the delightful truth that he is in yet closer relationship with Jesus? For if the crucified malefactor be the type of the old man, which he is most significantly, the believing penitent, alike suspended on the cross, is the equally apt figure of the new man, between whom and his former and still present hateful self, Jesus intervenes. The blessed Saviour interposes himself between the believer and his corrupt nature, for he it is who supplies him with weapons against his indwelling sin, which is only effectually overcome by the words of Christ's mouth. (Rev. i. 16 : Psalm xvii. and Prov. ii. 10—15.)

And this indwelling corruption needs, as the conscious believer confesses, the continual *reproof* of the word of God. He finds the word profitable for reproof, for

correction, for instruction in righteousness. (2 Tim. iii. 16.) Again and again he acknowledges that such is his remaining sinfulness, that he requires the spur in the side, as well as the bit and bridle in the mouth. He has been often admonished, "be ye not as the horse or mule which have no understanding," (Psalm xxxii. 9.) but alas, he still finds within him a principle of insubordination to the law of God, (Rom. vii. 23,) needing too often the salutary discipline of the curb and lash.

That no sin shall have dominion over the believer, is a great Scripture truth, (Rom. vi. 14.) and that the young men in Christ have that word of God abiding in them, by the aid of which they continually overcome the wicked one is equally certain; nevertheless it is alike true, that they are more and more painfully instructed in the hateful nature of the sin which does so easily beset them. For the strength of sin is principally discovered in this; *that it strives for the mastery in the believer's soul*. That sin should keep the natural spirit in subjection is not so surprising, seeing that we are fallen in Adam, and that we are even "dead in sin;" but that it should exert so powerful an influence over those who are alive in Christ, over those who are born again of the Spirit, this it is that evinces the mighty power of sin. All previous conceptions of sin, fall short, therefore, of that full conviction of its malignity, which is produced by an understanding view of its remaining strength in the heart already sanctified by grace, and in a measure purified by faith. The believer has received a new nature, new affections, an enlightened understanding, a will ever inclined to God, and ever opposed to sin, which is the transgression of God's law. But he retains his old nature, which is unchanged, and till death inde-

structible in its principles of evil. Nor do these principles appear to admit of mitigation. They are not ameliorated or softened by the grace of God. Self-will is still self-will : self-love is still self-love. And from hence the believer's painfully protracted conflicts ; from hence also his deepening views of the " mighty power and exceeding sinfulness of sin." And were it not that the word of God abideth in him, the believer would be utterly cast down and discouraged in his conflicts with indwelling sin. But for this word, he would hearken to the suggestions of the enemy, and cast away his confidence in the fatherly love of God. For thus it is that Satan reasons to his heart ; You are a believer, and saved as you say, by grace. At such and such a time, you enjoyed certain experiences of the love of God to your soul. On such and such occasions, you acted faith, as you suppose, on Christ, to whom you have imagined yourself united by a true and living faith. So far have you gone in your confidence, as to be assured that none shall pluck you out of the hand of Jesus, nor out of the Father's hand. But does not a true faith produce its proper fruit, and from whence are your multiplied and daily sins ? From whence have been your acts of disobedience, since the time that you first knew, as you say, the Lord ? Does not the Scripture enjoin self-examination, and will it not be well that you prove to your own self, your faith by your works ? Will it not be safe to doubt, whether you are not up to this hour deceived ; for what if it should be so ? How fearful is the amount of peril to your soul, if all this time your experiences of grace and faith in Jesus are delusive ? And have you not some marks upon you of a portentous kind ? Look well if they be like to the spots of God's children, (Deut. xxxii. 5,) for if not, are not your former

joys to be classed with the joy of the hypocrite, which is but for a moment?

Of all the trials of faith, that is the most fearful, which assails the foundation of our personal interest in Christ. Of all the anguish inflicted upon the believer's heart, this is the keenest; to have it whispered to his soul, that it may be, he is not yet the object of the fatherly love of God, nor yet the subject of regenerating grace: and that he must needs be the object of the Father's hatred, if indeed he has, up to the present time, deceived himself with a merely imaginative faith. These suggestions are amongst those fiery darts of the devil, which do indeed threaten to consume the trembling believer's faith. For he pleads guilty to the accusations of the enemy. He is constrained to say, It is even so, I have been unfaithful to my God, I am truly an unprofitable servant.

But yet, in spite of these concessions, painfully extorted by the accuser of the brethren, the word of God remains with the believer, and there, as in a glass, he still beholds himself "accepted in the beloved," and ransomed by the blood of Jesus. And as to his former experience of grace and faith, can they be delusive? Surely not: for they are all in accordance with the written word. His experiences, his feelings, are all depicted there. It was by that word of God, that he first tried and proved the new light that dawned upon his soul. And by that word, he has again and again proved the feelings of his heart and affections of his mind, to be the genuine fruits of faith. He only discovered what faith was, by the word; and by finding in his own heart a living transcript of the faith described in the Scripture, the nature of the faith there portrayed, was fully revealed to him. And may all this be

delusive? Then the Scripture itself may be delusive, for the reality of the believer's faith rests upon that word. And here the tried Christian takes his stand: this is his strong hold: this his impregnable position. He says, my faith is the faith of the Scripture; my faith is simple trust in Jesus, as the Lamb slain to take away the sin of the world. My faith is a simple affiance in God's mercy through Christ. But also, I can aver that whilst I cling only to the Lord my righteousness, and confide only in the Father's love to me in him, I am assured, that at least in some faint degree, I love God, and delight in his law after the inner man. In the midst of all my sins, in the midst of all my shortcomings and actual transgressions, this inward witness testifies, that I love God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. That the will of the Father, is my will; the Son, the object of my supreme choice and love: the Spirit, the blessed being whose influences I prize beyond all earthly gifts. And so the word of God which abides with me and in me, assures me that I am a child of God in spite of all the accusations of sin and Satan. For of the wicked I read, that they do not thus know and love God. Of the unregenerate I read, that they have not as yet come to Jesus to be saved from wrath through him. Of the same class of persons I also read, that they do always resist the Holy Ghost, and even blaspheme the operations of his sanctifying grace. Then the word of God is the sure and steadfast anchor of my soul; and by means of this word, I find myself fast moored upon the rock, even upon Jesus, the sure foundation, which the Father's love has laid in Zion.

It is then by the instrumentality of the word of God, which abides in the believer's heart, that he is so strengthened in all his conflicts with sin and Satan, as

effectually to overcome the wicked one. No exigency arises, or can arise, but it is provided for in the all-comprehensive word of God. There are not any circumstances of trial which are not depicted there. All temptations that can exist, and every variety of suffering is described ; every accusation of conscience, of the law, and of the accuser of the brethren, fully met and answered. Do we need grace to help in time of need ? The word directs us how and where to obtain it. Do our hearts misgive, lest we should one day perish by the hands of our spiritual adversaries ? The word of Christ assures us, " I give unto my sheep eternal life : and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Do we fear, lest the well-grounded accusations of our adversary should prevail against us ? The Scripture teaches us to make a bold appeal to God as our justifier, and to " Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." (Rom. viii.) And in vain does Satan attempt to darken and pervert the signification of the word of God. Truly he does not leave this work untried, but happily for the believer, the Holy Ghost is himself the expositor of the word to his afflicted heart. He unfolds its meaning and applies its truth. Jesus also opens the understanding of his people, that they may understand the Scriptures. He expounds to them " all things that have reference to himself." (Luke xxiv.) Hence they cannot be deceived by the false glosses of their crafty enemy ; nor can he despoil them of that word of truth, which is written in lively characters, even by the finger of God himself upon the fleshly tables of their hearts.

But how shall any endure without the word of God abiding in them ? How shall any be strong, save by this

word? How shall the wicked one be overcome, except it be by "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God?" Our well-instructed adversary is fully aware of the nature of the weapon which ensures his discomfiture, although it be wielded by man's feeble arm. Hence he would fain wrest from man this two-edged sword. He would fain if he could, deprive the church of this possession. He would make man powerless, in order that he may retain over him, or once more regain, his usurped dominion. But blessed be God, he is not permitted to effect this. He does indeed blind and keep in darkness a large portion of our fallen race: he hides the word even from those who call Jesus Lord, from those who are baptised into his name, but he cannot conceal it from the elect of God. The people for whom Jesus died, are begotten again by the word which by the gospel is preached unto them. (Psalm i. 1—23, and James i. 18.) They grow and are nourished by the same word. (James ii. 2.) By the word they are sanctified and cleansed, (John xvii. 17, and Eph. v. 26,) and retaining their hold of this word, they overcome all obstacles, endure unto the end, and are saved. (Rev. iii. 8—10.)

"I write unto you, Fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning." And again in verse 14, *"I have written unto you, Fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning."* It is remarkable that in the reduplication of our apostle's address to those established believers whom he designates *fathers*, he uses no variety of language in specifying the nature of their attainments. He twice repeats, "Ye have known him that was from the beginning." And from this repetition we may properly infer, that the believer's latest and most perfect acquisitions in divine truth, consist in the knowledge of Christ ;

in the knowledge of his person as God-man; in the knowledge of his person as very and true and eternal God. Now the believer (as before observed in the remarks made on a former verse,) is never without some degree of acquaintance with Jesus, however scanty may be his measure of saving knowledge, and however imperfect his apprehension of divine truth. When convinced of sin, and of the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, when constrained by fear and the warning of God's Spirit to flee from the wrath to come, and when made willing in the day of God's power to lay hold upon the hope set before him in the gospel, then the returning sinner has an eye to Jesus, and sees in him the mediator appointed of the Father to be his surety and his friend. And so afterwards, through the whole of his Christian warfare, Jesus is still present to the eye of his faith, as the high priest of his profession, and his advocate with the Father. But still the believer's knowledge of Christ is most imperfect, until by the enlarged and matured operations of the Spirit, Jesus is revealed to his soul as the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of his person, as the all-glorious being, who as touching his godhead, is equal to the Father; and until he is apprehended, not only as the gracious mediator in whom the Father is well pleased, but as being himself "the mighty God," "God over all blessed for ever." In the commencement of the life of faith, the newly-awakened soul perceives itself to be in peril by reason of sin, and is oppressed with a sense of misery in its conscious alienation from the favour of God. And then it is that the new consciousness of evil desert, and the intense desire of finding mercy and favour with God, excites the cry, "What

shall I do to be saved ? ” and also stimulates the soul under the guidance of a divine teaching, to have recourse to the oracles of God, that it may ascertain from those lively oracles, how its salvation is to be secured. Moreover, it is then that the contrite sinner, enlightened by the Scriptures, thus appeals to God, and makes his fervent humble suit for pardon and for life. “ Father, receive me for Jesus’ sake. Thou art holy and just to punish sin. I am a sinner, but I plead thy word of promise. Thou hast said that thou canst be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly ; holy, and yet merciful in and through thy well-beloved Son. I lay hold of thy covenant of grace and peace ; I implore thy mercy which thou hast said shall be extended to all who seek it in the name of Christ.”

Now, should it be admitted, (and it can hardly be denied) that the first actings of the faith of God’s elect, are of the kind just described, may we not add how imperfectly is Christ apprehended in these actings of faith. Truly it is by the operation of the Spirit of Christ, that any child of man thus simply casts his trembling soul at the feet of the Heavenly Father, praying for admission into the adoption of grace, and pleading with God his own promise of mercy in Christ, as a reason why his suit should not be refused. But distinctly as faith, precious faith, is alive and active in these incipient wrestlings of the soul with God, how feebly is *Christ* apprehended. He is perceived to be the medium through whom God will have mercy, but the glory of his person is unknown. The new born soul is obedient to the heavenly warning ; it flees from the wrath to come : more than this, it is allured by some feeble sense of the love of God. There is a dawning consciousness of God’s great love breaking in upon the soul, and exciting love to him in return. It is not only fear that

prompts the awakened penitent to come with weeping and supplication to his alienated Father. There is in his heart something more than the dread of God's vindictive justice. A far different emotion mingles with this dread, when he reflects,—I am an alien from my Father's love; not only an object, it may be, of his future indignation, but shut out from the light of his most blissful countenance. And surely faith is alive, and the Spirit of God, that is, of Christ, most active in the heart of the new-born saint, whilst he thus reasons concerning his own state as a prodigal son, and ardently longs to possess the enjoyment of his heavenly Father's love. But still Christ all the while is most imperfectly apprehended by this incipient although true faith. For if faith, as before observed, has an eye to him, which it must ever have in a degree, it would still seem that Jesus is scarcely more revealed to the soul that is thus surely coming to God through him, than he was of old to the fathers, who approached God in the faith of the Mediator, but certainly for the most part with feeble and imperfect views of the excellent glory of his person. These observations tend, as will be readily perceived, to this point: to establish the propriety of our apostle's appropriation of the knowledge of Christ to a maturity of Christian experience. The little children and the young men, according to their measure, believe in Jesus, and they love him too: *The fathers know in whom they have believed*; they have known him that is from the beginning. Should any object, that although it may be true that the little children are imperfectly acquainted with the person of Christ, surely the young men are not the subjects of this ignorance; it must be replied, upon the concurrent testimony of the word of God, and of the experience of believers, that properly to know

him who is from the beginning, is rather the portion of the father in Christ, than of the Christian in his less advanced state of the life of faith. The testimony of our apostle is very clear to this effect. The little children know the Father. The young men have a peculiar and deeply experimental acquaintance with the power of the word of God, by the faith of which "*they overcome the wicked one.*" To the fathers it is given to know him who first introduced them to the knowledge of a reconciled God, to know him who in every battle has been the strength of their right hand; who by his Spirit has applied the word of his testimony to their hearts, imparting to them at the same time, that faith in his word, without which it is profitless and vain. To the fathers, or matured believers, this privilege then is assigned; "*to know him that is from the beginning,*" and our attention must now be directed to ascertain if possible, the nature of that peculiar knowledge of Christ, which is marked out as the prerogative of the old, rather than of the youthful disciple. But here we must interpose a remark, lest any should infer, that the order of the spiritual life is regulated by the Spirit of God, in a way of perfect analogy with the life of the natural man. Certainly the emblems used in scripture, (which agree precisely with the believer's experience) clearly indicate that the spiritual man grows in divine knowledge, even as the natural man increases in his acquaintance with the things that are seen and temporal. This difference, however, is to be observed. Nature for the most part is very uniform in her operations, but in the operations of grace there is more diversity. Now, as St. Paul observes, when for the time we ought to be teachers of others, we "have need that one teach us again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and

are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." (Heb. v. 11, &c.) It does not therefore follow as a matter of course, that lengthened years of Christian profession bring with them, the maturity of spiritual understanding. Far from it; the apostle's reproof implies the contrary. Too often those are still babes, who should be grown men; and on the other hand, through the sovereignty and omnipotence of grace, such a maturity of knowledge is attained by some who for the time might appear to be only babes, that the elders in the faith, are constrained to wonder and adore, and humbly to confess whilst contemplating their own slow progress, that the last are first, and the first last.

To return to the subject suggested to our consideration, by the words of our apostle; What is that peculiar knowledge of Christ to which the fathers attain? In what does it consist, and in what particulars does it differ from that less distinct and perfect knowledge of Jesus, which all possess who have any saving faith at all? These questions will be best answered by an appeal to the fathers themselves, for it is only their experience which can satisfy such inquirers. To them it has been given to know him that is from the beginning, and they only can inform us, as to the nature of this knowledge. Now from them we learn, that this knowledge of Jesus consists in an experimental acquaintance with the divine glory of his person, as the God-man, who by his obedience unto death, procured for them the pardon of their sins, and the righteousness which is their title to eternal life. From the testimony of the fathers we ascertain that they have been gradually acquiring a practical knowledge of the nature of their redemption in Christ, of the efficacy of his atoning blood, and justifying righteousness; and moreover, that their increasing sanctifi-

cation by the Spirit, has been effected by the Holy Ghost, taking of the things of Christ and shewing them to their souls. Their increasing knowledge of Christ's glorious person, has been the means whereby they have become dead to the world, and the world dead to them. The knowledge of Christ has put to shame all other knowledge : the glory of his person has eclipsed all the wisdom, and honour, and pride of man. And first, in regard to that knowledge of Jesus, which is connected with deep practical views of the nature and efficacy of his atonement, the fathers give us this account of their experience :—They tell us, that in the early part of their spiritual life, they were not much occupied in inquiring into the nature and work of that Son of God, through whom they had themselves become sons of God. Conscious of the fact of their reconciliation, through a mediator appointed of the Father, they rejoiced in the delightful conviction that they were no longer aliens from his family. They sweetly reposed in the blessed consciousness of their adoption, for the Spirit witnessed with their spirits, that they were the children of God. But although by no means ignorant of their obligations to Jesus, they knew not how great, how superlatively great were those obligations. They looked upon Jesus as the Saviour, through whom their offended Father would be propitious. Very gladly did they come to God through him. But they did not inquire particularly who is this Jesus, through whom alone the Father is well-pleased. Far, very far from stumbling at the chief corner-stone, laid of God in Zion, they yet did not know, that Christ was not only elect, but precious, in a sense transcending the utmost worth of any creature, however excellent, or glorious, or exalted. They knew that without shedding of blood there was no remission; also,

that the blood of Christ was shed to make atonement for their sins. This they believed on the testimony of the Scriptures. But the fathers testify that at that period the Holy Ghost had not revealed to them as he has since done; that the blood shed on the Cross, was the blood *of God*; that is, of the God-man, who in his divine nature is equal with the eternal Father. Not that at any time they had opposed any doctrine of our most holy faith. It was not so. Every doctrine was assented to, on the warrant of the word of God, but still without a spiritual apprehension and understanding of the same. But the fathers attest that they now see clearly by the further teaching of the Spirit, that there is an infinite fitness in the atonement of Christ, as of the God manifest in the flesh; and that their new knowledge of the infinite dignity of the person of Jesus, substantiates to their souls the fact of his atonement, in a way that had no place when they rested their hopes of pardon simply on the promise of the word of God. The fathers know indeed that they cannot rest too simply on the word of promise. They know that by this simple faith in God's mercy in Christ, as set forth in the Scripture, salvation is obtained. But also they find, that the ground of this salvation is revealed to them, in proportion as they become acquainted with that Christ who is himself their salvation. For *the word* of God's free promise in Christ, must be distinguished from *that person* of the Lord Jesus, to which we become united by faith. The word of God's promise is one thing—the person of Christ another. To both of these faith has respect; only, in its earlier actings, it chiefly eyes the word of promise, and in its more mature developement, it fixes its stedfast gaze on Jesus, as its proper and all-glorious object. Again we repeat, Jesus is not and cannot be

unknown to the believer even in the earliest stages of his life of faith ; but yet it is also true, that an adequate knowledge of his person is the last and highest attainment of that life. And should it appear strange to any that the knowledge of Christ, rather than the knowledge of God the Father, is proposed to us as the highest degree of knowledge to which the believer can attain, this difficulty is easily solved, by the consideration, that the perfections of the Father's nature and attributes, are alone disclosed to us in the person of our Emmanuel God with us ; so that we come to know God, precisely in the proportion that we know Christ. For in Christ the divine perfections of the Father are all exhibited, in the person of Jesus they all meet, and are displayed to the adoring view of his believing people. There is therefore no cause of alarm, lest in exalting the knowledge of Christ, we disparage or cast into the shade the knowledge of the august and ever-blessed Father. The very reverse of this is the fact. The Father is unrevealed and unknown save in his Son. "The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." And if it be so, as most surely it is, how fearful are the mazes of error, in which those persons are involved, who affect to know of a God out of Christ, and who pretend to honour the Father, whilst they think lightly of the divine person of the Son. But such blindness is abundantly reprov'd by the Scriptures, nor can it by any possibility exist where there is saving grace, and a work of divine illumination in the heart, the especial office of the Spirit of God under the Gospel dispensation being always this—"To take of the things of *Christ*, and to show them unto us."

Now as before observed, the believer grows into the knowledge of Christ, and from this increasing know-

ledge becomes acquainted with the nature of his salvation, and of his immense and varied obligations to his dying and risen Lord. Also out of this knowledge of the person of Christ, spring other perceptions, and more accurate discoveries of important truths. For an example, let us consider what are the believer's views in regard to *sin*, in the earlier and more mature stages of his regenerate life. Sin is always alarming and hateful to the new-born soul. Alarming, because it incurs the wrath of God, which the awakened soul discovers to be revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man; and hateful, because the new nature with its new instinct of holiness, does of necessity loathe that which the blessed God abhors. But sin is only properly known to be "exceeding sinful," when the believer is instructed that no arm save that of "the mighty God" (Isaiah ix. 6.) could relieve him of the accursed load: and that even that same Almighty being sunk prostrate into the dust of death, when in his stupendous love, he had taken on himself that burthen which must needs sink the strongest and most exalted creature into the lowest hell. Relying on the proffered grace and mercy of God, the novice in the faith is fully persuaded that God "has laid help upon one that is mighty," but how mighty he knows not, till Christ is revealed to his soul, as "God over all blessed for ever." And when he is so revealed, not only is the malignant and dreadful nature of sin revealed also, but his own complete salvation from that sin is also fully ascertained. The Lord Jesus has taken it on himself. But could he indeed bear the load? Could he so endure its weight as to carry it away into a land not inhabited. Could he cast it from him even into the depths of the bottomless abyss? The anxious heart makes these inquiries, and

seeks for a further confirmation of its faith in this matter. And this especially, as fresh and fresh discoveries of sin after grace received, urge the trembling believer to examine well the rock upon which he builds his hope. Now to all such inquiries, the Holy Ghost—"the Comforter," who is also "the Spirit of Truth" responds, that Jesus *as God* is "*able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him.*" No *creature* can endure the weight of his own sin, how much less then shall he endure the weight of another's sin. Sin, as an offence committed against the infinite God, is an infinite offence, which must crush the finite being into hopeless perdition. The finite cannot sustain the infinite, but the infinite can do this. There is no limit to the power of the Almighty God. There is no limit therefore to the power of Christ, who is also God. And we may observe in connection with our present all-important subject, (and in allusion again to the same unhappy class of reasoners whom we recently adverted to) how inevitably does the rejection of the doctrine of Christ's deity, bring with it the rejection of the doctrine of the atonement, and of the need of that atonement. The fact of the infinite offence of sin, as the transgression of the divine law, if admitted, must indicate the necessity of an Almighty Saviour. But Jesus is denied to be Almighty. He is an excellent and highly-honoured creature, say these carnal reasoners, but by no means God; and what follows this assumption? another like unto it. That sin is by no means an offence of the kind imagined by the party who term themselves orthodox. That it does not need the expiation of the blood of God, that is, of the God-man. It is an evil indeed, because it entails some present misery on the creature, but it is not an infinite evil, as they pretend; neither is an in-

finite arm needed to lift away the load of man's iniquity. The finite being can well enough endure the burthen of his own guilt, and himself cast away, if he pleases so to do, the sins of his mortal life. But these reasoners have never been convinced of sin by the power of the Holy Ghost: (John xvi. 8, 9.) The Spirit of God has not revealed to them how poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked they are by nature. Intoxicated with the delusions of the Father of lies, they are lulled to sleep in a false dream of human worth, and power, and goodness; professing in a measure to honour Jesus, they rob him of all his glory, and at the same time miserably despoil themselves of eternal life. For the decree of God shall not be revoked; "*Every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, shall have everlasting life; but he that believeth not is condemned, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.*" The believer, as before observed, grows into a far different knowledge: the increasing conviction of his utterly fallen state by nature. Day by day, he learns more of the mystery of the iniquity of sin in general, and of his own in particular. Every day he discovers its root to be deeper, and its fruit more deadly and malignant. And therefore it is, that Jesus becomes increasingly "all his desire," just as he is discovered to be "all his salvation." Oh truth, precious and sweet to the convinced sinner's heart! 'I am poor indeed; but Christ is rich, and he is mine: I am miserable, but Jesus possesses pleasures for evermore; these too are mine. (Psalm xvi. 11.) I am blind; but I can say to Jesus, "Thou God seest me;" and already he has said to me, "I will guide thee with mine eye." (Psalm xxxii. 8.) I am naked, in myself indeed; but not so in Christ; whom I put on by faith, and with

whom clothed, the shame of my nakedness can by no means appear.'

The mention of the clothing of the believer, with the righteousness of Christ, leads us very naturally, from the consideration of his divine person as a sin-bearing, and sin-atonement Saviour, to another part of the knowledge of Christ possessed by the Fathers, that of his equally glorious person, as "the Lord, Jehovah our righteousness." But here the believer may be ready to pause, and say with those interesting Greeks mentioned in John xii. 21, "We would see *Jesus*," We would again see *Jesus*. We would know still more of him by that name of Saviour. We desire indeed to know Christ as "the Lord our righteousness;" but first, let us once more contemplate him, as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Let us behold him with the fixed gaze of faith, sustaining the vast load of our guilt, and so bearing it, as to bear it altogether away; that we may be fully assured, that the piercing eye of the divine justice can no more "discern iniquity in Jacob nor perverseness in Israel." Nor can we be surprised that the broken-hearted penitent should thus cling to the person of the God-man who "receiveth sinners and eateth with them." That the contrite in spirit should be most reluctant to leave the cross, is not wonderful. For how are the fierce pains of sin assuaged, save by the washing of the blood of Jesus. How are its wounds healed, save by the dropping of that balm which distils from the wounds of Christ? But sweet as it is, to linger still at the foot of the cross; and more than this, expedient and necessary as it is, that our feet remain immoveably fixed and rooted there, we must nevertheless turn our eyes to those other manifestations of the glorious person of our Lord, which the

Holy Ghost reveals for the apprehension of our faith. And is it not expedient that we should see Jesus, not only as dying for our sins, but also as rising again for our justification? If he rise not, where is the authentic proof that our vast debt is paid, and that he has gained the victory over sin, death, and hell? "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept." To satisfy us of the fact of our redemption, and to make an open display before angels and devils, as well as men, of his perfect achievement of a work, which could not have been effected, save by the arm of the Almighty God, our Jesus rises from the dead, and displays himself to our believing eyes, as "the Lord our righteousness." Now the Holy Ghost reveals him to us in a new character. We saw him before as our Immanuel, "God with us." God in our nature, but yet as one who being fashioned as a man, had emptied himself of his godhead, which veiled in flesh, emitted but comparatively faint radiations of its glory. We saw him as a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; oppressed and afflicted, wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities. We beheld him as a victim of the wrath of God, and apparently consumed by the fire of his justice. But is it so? Is he indeed consumed? Could that be? Impossible. The victim is no other than the eternal Son of God; and in proof of his deity we behold him "declared to be the Son of God, with power, by the resurrection from the dead." (Rom. i. 4.) In virtue then of his essential godhead, by the power of which Christ endured and carried away the load of our guilt, we behold him also rising from the dead, as "the Lord our Righteousness." By the death of Christ our sin is taken away; by his resurrection we become invested with a positive righteousness. "He rose again for our

justification," which words imply, that the act of Christ's resurrection constitutes his people righteous in the sight of God." But we naturally seek for more perfect information on the subject of that righteousness which becomes ours by the resurrection of Jesus. Of what nature is this righteousness? Is it the righteousness of a mere man? If so, it would seem to be imperfect and defective, "and the covering narrower than that a man can wrap himself in it." But these fears are groundless, for Christ is himself our righteousness. He is "Jehovah our righteousness;" and his perfections are the garments of salvation, in which our otherwise naked souls are clothed. Christ has indeed wrought out for us the perfect obedience of a man, which the gracious Father transfers to the account of his people; but who shall adequately measure or define that righteousness which the saints possess in Christ their head, of whose august and sacred body they are no other than the members? This righteousness is always termed in Scripture, "the righteousness of God," and it is said to be "unto all, and upon all them that believe." It is a righteousness imputed to the believer, and not inherent in him. A righteousness fully imputed to him, when it may be, that the germs only of the new birth begin to bud and blossom in his soul. For this righteousness is not of works, but of gift, and is termed in Scripture a gift, a free gift, (Rom. v. 15—18.) even as Christ himself is said to be the unspeakable gift of the father. And here again the believer is led by the Spirit of God, to realize the all-important fact of his actual union with the divine person of the Saviour, and in that union to discern his own righteousness; according as it is written, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." And if one, then those moral and spiritual perfections of

Christ which constitute his righteousness, must of necessity be ours, for we are one with Christ, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, the living branches of the true vine, and possessing, as one principle of life, that same divine sap which the root supplies.

It is certainly difficult for the believer to realize his actual and present completeness in Christ, whilst he finds himself to be the subject of so much remaining corruption ; and whilst he is groaning from time to time under the pressure of a body of sin and death, he often thinks within himself, " The consideration of my remaining sin, and its continual need of remission, seems enough to occupy all my present thoughts. How shall I direct them to the believing contemplation of my righteousness in Christ? I am harassed by indwelling sin. My garments are defiled anew ; and I have still to betake myself to Jesus, to be " cleansed in the fountain of his blood." But whilst the believer is right in making this true confession of sin, and rightly insists on the necessity of a continual remission, he is wrong if he infer that his mind must of necessity be so absorbed in one part of his work, as to make the performance of any other part inexpedient or impossible. Truly, he will not duly know him "*that was from the beginning,*" except he knew him as that Lord who is the righteousness of his people. The Scripture continually portrays him as such, and the Holy Ghost reveals him as such, therefore we must not be without this knowledge of Christ, and of ourselves in him. And how greatly does this knowledge tend to an increasing love of Jesus, and to a conformity to his holy likeness. God has said to his people, " The joy of the Lord is your strength." And is not this joy immeasurably increased, when we know ourselves, not only to be pardoned sinners, but

justified believers ? so justified, as to be really righteous in the Father's sight, with a righteousness commensurate with the righteousness of his own Son ? The idea indeed is so vast a one, that we can scarcely take it in, and we are ready, it may be, to shrink back from ascribing such a possession to our sinful selves. But if by faith we are enabled to do this, if by faith we can give credit to the testimony of the Lord, "that his thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways," then we may be able to rejoice anew in Christ, "with a joy unspeakable and full of glory." And may we not ask, when tempted to doubt of the fact of the prodigious gift of "the righteousness of God," is this gift greater than the unspeakable gift of God's own Son ? Is the righteousness of the eternal Son, a more surprising endowment of the heavenly Father's love, than the gift out of his own bosom of that Son, to us men, and for our salvation ? We see at once that this cannot be, and that the same God who freely imparts to us his only-begotten Son, "will with him also freely give us all things." (Rom. viii. 32.) And why then stagger at the promise of God, through unbelief ? Why consider the deadness of our own bodies, as any obstacle to the fulfilment of the promise ? (Rom. iv. 19, 26.) They are indeed "dead because of sin, but the spirit is life, because of righteousness." (Rom. viii. 10.) Our remaining corruption does not then invalidate the glorious truth that we are righteous in the right of God, that is, that we are invested with the righteousness of his Son ; nor should our views of our own sin so occupy our minds, as to prevent us from realizing our completeness in Christ, and rejoicing therein. This we must do, that Jesus may be duly known by us as the God of our life, and duly loved and rejoiced in, as the God of our com-

plete salvation. This we must do, in order also that the Father's love may be acknowledged in his stupendous gift. For it is the Father who has bestowed on us his Son. It is the Father who has bestowed on us the righteousness of his Son. It is the Father, who permitting us to lose the righteousness of the creature, and to become disobedient by the disobedience of one man, (our father Adam) has in the wonderful counsel of his boundless love and grace, far more than repaired to us this damage, by bestowing on us his own righteousness, even the righteousness of the creator; for of Christ we affirm upon the testimony of the Scripture, that he is not only God, but the God "by whom all things were made, and without whom was not any thing made that was made."

But how does that knowledge of "*Him that is from the beginning*," to which the fathers are said to have attained, bring with it the possession of that holiness, without which, even these highly-enlightened believers cannot see the Lord? This question is a very important one, but easily resolved. It is an important one, for how shall we ever contemplate with indifference or without an emotion of holy fear, those scriptures which remind us that no mere illumination of the natural mind, however extensive on points of doctrine, can avail as the substitute for that purity of heart, which is necessarily and by the divine decree connected with the beatific vision of God. But the question is easily answered, when we call to mind that such a knowledge of Christ as we have supposed the fathers to possess, is no illumination of the natural mind, but such a spiritual apprehension of the glory of the Redeemer's person, as can only be attained by that faith which is the gift of God. And how does the Holy Ghost carry on the

work of sanctification in the believer's heart? How does he make him more and more a possessor of that holiness, which is provided for the elect in the treasury of the divine grace and counsel? (Eph. i. 4.) Surely this is mainly effected by the presentation of Christ to the believer's soul, as the object of his faith and love. "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." That knowledge of the divine person of the God-man which the fathers in the faith possess, is necessarily a transforming knowledge. It cannot be otherwise, and the scripture decides the point in the affirmative. Behold then, the fact of the believer's redemption, justification, and sanctification, to be fully ascertained by his knowledge of "*Him that is from the beginning.*" By the same eye of faith that contemplates the Lamb of God as bearing away the sin of the world, the believer sees his own sin to be removed. He discerns in that act of Christ, the redemption of his own soul. By the same faith, he also regards Jesus as made of God unto him righteousness; (1 Cor. i. 30.) and this twofold view of his divine Saviour, coupled with the assurance that Christ is in very deed his own Lord and God, issues in constraining love to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and to man for the Lord's sake,—even in that present fulfilling of the law which attests the reality of faith, and in that purification of the heart which is ever the accompaniment and effect of faith. Let none fear then, that the knowledge of "*Him that is from the beginning,*" is a merely speculative, and therefore, it may be, unprofitable knowledge. It is impossible that this should be the case. For "this is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." And indeed this

knowledge of Christ's person on earth, is the best, the only true preparation for the enjoyment of his presence in heaven. Knowing him on earth, we shall be in a degree prepared for the future manifestations of his glory, and shall be in a measure qualified to take our place before his throne, and to mingle our praises with the adorations of the blest. "Sing ye praises with understanding," is the command of our God even to his earthly worshippers. How much more then shall the knowledge of the glory of the Lord be necessary in the worship of the courts above ! But that knowledge must be acquired here. It will be perfected in heaven, but its first rudiments must be learnt on earth. Even now we must know Him that is from the beginning. Even now we must learn to set forth His praise with an understanding heart. Now we must know him as our Saviour-God, or we cannot be prepared to join hereafter in the song of the redeemed, or to ascribe "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

Whilst meditating on a subject which involves the great truth of the essential deity of Christ, it is impossible not to revert again and again in spirit to those persons who resolutely defraud Christ of his glory, and who only allow him to possess the attributes of a highly exalted creature. But as there must needs be heresies, as the apostle teaches us, in order that the faith of true believers may be proved, so in the gracious and wise counsel of God, these very heresies tend to the more perfect establishment of the faith of his elect. And this is remarkably the case in regard to the truth of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Contested as it has been, and still is, by sacrilegious reasoners after the

flesh, it remains as the increasingly bright light, which more and more irradiates the church. And so it must be, else the all-prevailing prayer of the Son of God would remain unanswered, which is a thing impossible. For let us observe the request of Jesus to the Father, offered up when he was about to quit the form of a servant, in which he had so long shrouded his divinity. He says, "O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with that glory which I had with thee before the world was;" and he grounds this petition upon his accomplishment of the work which the Father had given him to do. (John xvii. 4, 5.) Speaking, (should we paraphrase the passage) to this effect, 'O Father, the completion of the work of my humiliation is at hand. The last hour of my agony and death draws near. At thy bidding I have made myself of no reputation, I have taken on me the form of a servant, and have been made in the likeness of men; and being "found in fashion as a man, I have humbled myself, and have become obedient unto death even the death of the cross." (Phil. ii. 6—8.) But it is expedient for my people that they behold my glory as equal with thine own. (Verse 24.) That they should see me, by the eye of faith, invested with the glory "which I had with thee, before the world was." Hereafter, by thy decree they are to "be with me where I am, in the kingdom which thou hast prepared for them from the foundation of the world." (Matt. xxv. 24.) Then they shall behold my uncreated glory: but even now, "Father, glorify thou me, with the glory which I had with thee," "before the mountains were settled, and before the hills were brought forth." (Rev. viii. 25.) Cause my people to know me, as the brightness of thy glory and the express image of thy person, as thine eternal Son, by whom thou didst make the

worlds, and as upholding all things by the word of my power. (Heb. i. 3.) No man knoweth the Son, but thou Father knowest him; (Matt. xi. 27.) and it is thy will that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour thee the Father. To this end therefore manifest my glory to the men "whom thou gavest me out of the world, and to them also which shall believe on me through their word." That they may know me to be him who is from the beginning, and that they may trust in me as an almighty Saviour. That, acquainted with the truth of my essential Godhead, every knee may bow, and every tongue confess me to be Lord; and that every heart prepared on earth by this previous knowledge of my glory, may find me in the dissolution of its natural life, its strength, and its portion for ever.' "

The declaration of our apostle respecting the fathers, that "*they have known Him that is from the beginning,*" must include also, on the part of these veterans in the faith, a spiritual perception and apprehension of that ancient covenant, entered into by the Father with his eternal Son, on the behalf of that people whom he foreknew and loved with an everlasting love. More than this, it supposes a recognition of the person of the divine Redeemer, yielding himself up before all worlds to be the future surety of his church, its atoning sacrifice, and its law-fulfiller. For the expression, "*to know Him that is from the beginning,*" not only implies a knowledge of the eternal Sonship and true deity of Christ, but a knowledge also of that same Christ, as "made of God unto us," *even from the beginning* "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." The fathers discern from the testimony of the scriptures, and by the teaching of the Spirit, accompanying the revelation of the word, that the love of God, in Christ, to

their souls, was no afterthought of his mercy, subsequent upon the fall which they experienced in their father Adam. They see that this love existed "*from the beginning*," and was far from being the fruit of God's love, in time only. And how greatly does this apprehension of the eternal Son of God as from the beginning assigned to them as their covenant head, and surety, and friend, tend to increase their love to the Father and the Son, and to confirm their faith in the counsels of the persons of the Godhead. Nor is this view of the purpose of God, which was from the beginning in Christ, superfluous to the tried believer, who has proved the vanity of his own mind, and the desperate wickedness of his own heart. For now he has discovered, that God's mercy to him in Christ, could not have been bestowed on account of any foreknown difference hereafter to exist between himself and the mass of mankind. Alas! he has found in himself the seed of every sin, and the root of all iniquities. But for preventing grace, he had been as vile as any of the children of men! And from whence this preventing and saving grace, but from the eternal counsel devised before the foundations of the world, to illustrate the perfections of the triune God? And here the mind reposes, which, it may be, could scarcely otherwise repose, under the sense of its own utter unworthiness of the love of God. For it reasons thus—'I am vile indeed, and in my own eyes an unbecoming object of the divine complacency. But my heavenly Father's love to me in his Son, is the result of the counsel of his own grace. His love to me springs from an eternal fountain, and by the display of this eternal love, the Father of my spirit purposes, not only my salvation, but his own glory. For through me he will display his divine perfections to the powers and

principalities in heavenly places, (Eph. iii. 10, 11.) And herein my trembling spirit is reassured, for now I can perceive a fitness, if not in the salvation of one so vile as I am, yet in the good pleasure of that will of God, which has chosen me *in Christ* before the foundation of the world, “that I should be holy and without blame before him in love, *to the praise of the glory of his grace*, (Eph. i. 4—6.) *wherein he hath made me accepted in the beloved.*”

Our consideration of the passage before us has been already a lengthened one. But is it therefore complete? God forbid that we should assume this, or imagine that even the thousandth part of what might be written, has been expressed. Before quitting a theme of such immeasurable extent, let us however again call to mind, that the knowledge of him who is from the beginning, to be saving, must be more than theoretical; it must be experimental. That Christ must himself be formed within our hearts by the power of faith and the Holy Ghost, and that he must himself be “in us the hope of glory.” And truly the experience of the fathers in Christ testifies of those peculiar operations of grace, which distinguish the real believer, from the mere professor of a nominal Christianity. And if it were not so, what difference would exist between the visible and invisible church of Christ? The visible church is made up for the most part of those who have only a name to live whilst they are dead. The invisible church consists of those persons whose spiritual profession and character cannot by any possibility be discerned or tried by those who are not themselves partakers of the same grace and faith. (1 Cor. ii. 15.) It consists of those whose “life is hid with Christ in God.” Of those who live by the faith of that Son of God, who loved them and

gave himself for them. And as the life of faith advances, as this hidden life goes on in the soul towards its maturity, Jesus is of necessity more and more known, for this hidden life of the soul has an immediate reference to Him ; or rather He is himself this life. He is its principle and author. He maintains it, he actuates its otherwise sluggish movements, so that the believer, when speaking of his own spiritual works, must still add with the apostle, " Yet not I, but Christ who liveth in me." Again we repeat, the knowledge of Him who is from the beginning is an experimental knowledge. It is true that the Holy Ghost enlightens the eyes of the believer's understanding, and that he discerns the glorious person of the only begotten of the Father to be exactly what the Scriptures describe it to be, and in this way acquires a glorious light of truth, ennobling as well as irradiating the highest intellectual faculties of his complex nature. But this light of truth, in revealing the person of Christ to the believer, does more for him than fill his understanding with sublime conceptions. It is the light which, dawning more and more unto the perfect day, increasingly confirms and guides the tried believer's steps, whilst he is passing onward amidst the changes and chances of this mortal life. " I am the light of the world," says Jesus, " He that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." And it is this light, emitted by him who is our Sun of Righteousness, which is the light of life to our souls. It is no light of the moon, beautiful but cold—greatly to be admired, but unproductive of any fructifying influence. Far from this, our light is the glory of the Lord, and when it comes and arises upon us, its effect is to make us arise and shine too. And then it is that our souls cease from cleaving to the dust of this fallen earth.

Then it is that we mount up as on eagle's wings, and shake from off our garments, the pollutions of the world and of sin; that we shine in the beauties of holiness, in the bright reflected light of Him who is holy and true, and that we set forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into the marvellous light of his own glorious person.

Let us still follow the fathers for a moment, whilst they recount to us some of the experiences by which they have grown into their present acquaintance with him who is from the beginning. And they state to us that this has taken place, by an actual participation on their part of "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all," in agreement with what is declared by the apostle John in his gospel. "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace, corresponding to, or commensurate with his grace;" for so the expression in the Greek may be rendered. It has been by actually *finding all their need supplied* in the Lord Jesus Christ, that the fathers have been enabled to set to their seal, that God is true, and that all his promises "are yea and amen in Christ Jesus." This indeed we are bound to believe at all times, and under all circumstances, although sense and reason may give a different judgment. For the genuine language of faith, when it is in due exercise, must ever agree with the beautiful and deeply affecting apostrophe of the prophet Habakkuk, as recorded in the last verses of the memorable prayer that bears his name. But still, whilst at fit times, and in peculiar seasons, and for specific ends, appointed of God, the poor and needy believer may in a certain sense "seek water and find none;" (Isa.) the promises of grace, mercy, and peace in Christ Jesus cannot fail of their accomplishment. They are at all times true to all the spiritual seed, and they are also

found to be true, of those who by faith inherit the promises. And will not the heart of the believer who has for some time known the Lord, respond to this declaration? Will he not be ready to declare, "Mercy and truth have followed me all my days;" will he not take up the confession of the fathers in the faith, and say—'At such and such a time I found mercy with the Lord in the pardon of all my sins. At such and such a time I was cleansed by the application of the blood of Jesus to my guilty soul. Then it was he discovered to me, in his pure and spotless nativity, my own freedom from the imputation of original corruption, and in his all-sufficient sacrifice, the expiation of my inherent and actual iniquity. And when discouraged by my indwelling sin, how has Jesus revealed to me his righteousness as the garment which could cover deformity great as mine. Also, when the enemy with numerous devices sought to persecute my soul even unto death, did not Christ in that hour appear as my defence, and deliver me from the power of all adversaries? What device of Satan has he not unmasked, what wile of the devil has he not discovered? But for the Lord Jesus could I have endured unto this day? By what wisdom of my own should I have frustrated the machinations of powers and principalities, and by what power of the creature, have repelled the might of the rulers of the darkness of this evil world? In all my temptations, in all my conflicts, the same watchful eye, and faithful arm, have effected my deliverance. I was blind, but Jesus discerned my danger afar off. I was weak, but my Lord was strong. And what more shall I say? Shall I keep back aught which may redound to the glory of my gracious almighty friend? Shall I forbear to say, that my faithlessness did not prevent the continuance of his faithfulness; and that

my frowardness did not weary out his gentleness and patience? If I was fickle, was he therefore inconstant? Rather, has he not been to me the same God to-day and yesterday, and will he not be the same God for ever? On what occasion have I cried unto him, and he has failed to deliver me; and what necessity of mine has he left unsupplied? No such experience stands recorded in the book of my remembrance. There every fact testifies of the unfailing grace of Jesus, and of his divine attributes of power, love, and truth. Had he been less than God, he could not have supplied my need as he has done. Had he been any other than the Lord, my provocations had ere this constrained him to exchange his love of me for hatred: he had surely forgotten to be gracious, and had shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure. But behold he is the Lord: he changes not, therefore I am not consumed. He is no mere man that he should lie, or son of man that he should repent. He said, and he has done it. He spoke, and he has brought it to pass. The execution of all his promises, has attested the veracity of his word, and his ability to perform the same. Now I know him in whom I have believed, I know Him who is from the beginning.'

Before taking our last leave of our present subject, let us contemplate the blessed rest to which those fathers have attained, who have known him that is from the beginning. They enter into rest, even into the rest of faith. (Heb. iv. 3.) And should it be objected that all, even the little children and young men enter by faith into the same rest, we reply, this is true, but they do not so enter in as the fathers enter; for generally speaking, it is only given to the fathers in Christ to be delivered in spirit from the power of the law. From this yoke, the little children and young men are indeed

free, but they do not know themselves to be free. This knowledge, with few exceptions, implies advanced discipleship; and it consists in an accurate perception, and more than this, in a lively feeling, of our immunity in Christ from the curse of the law. Nor is this perception and feeling attained, as some suppose to be the case, when by the power of faith and by the witness of the Spirit, we are assured of our personal adoption into the family of God. Many believers are still comparatively ignorant, that "if the Son has set them free, then are they free indeed;" (John viii. 36.) and this is often the case, although they may have had reason to know their own calling and election of God. (1 Thess. i. 4, &c.) For if we examine the ordinary experience of the believer, we shall find that he is partly under grace, and partly under the law. He knows that he is justified by faith, and that in consequence thereof he enjoys peace with God. But yet, he still cleaves to his own righteousness, even to the righteousness which he is enabled to perform by the power of faith and the Holy Ghost, as to that performance of duty, which, duly executed, shall serve to maintain and establish the peace of his conscience. And here a grievous error has crept in, or rather, which may be nearer the truth, no new ignorance has been engendered, but the old propensity and strong natural bias of the mind and reason of man to the law of works, is discovered. Under those first convictions of sin, which are so wrought in the heart of the returning prodigal by the mighty power of God, as to constrain him to flee from the wrath to come, he does certainly renounce his own righteousness, and comes to God poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked. And as such he is received and accepted. As such he is saved gratuitously, through the medium of

that faith which enables him to discern his own miserable state, and that grace of God which bestows salvation on the guilty. But being justified by faith, what has the recent prodigal become? Rich, and blessed with abundance of every kind. He cannot be as before, "poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked," for all his need has been supplied from the bounty of his father's house. And shall he not now secure the continuance of his benefactor's favour, by the due improvement of his gifts? He begins by thinking he can do this now, because he now works, not in the strength of nature, but of the Spirit of Christ. And if at any time he offend (for where is the "just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not?") shall not the offence be repaired by greater faithfulness for the time to come? And shall he not in this way *reassure his own heart*, and produce fruits of righteousness which may be the testimony to his own soul that he has loved God with a perfect heart, and that his faith is the faith of the upright in heart? Now all this reasoning is defective, although it appears sound to those who use it. For by these sort of cogitations, although they may be accompanied by a corresponding practice, the believer's mind is *not* kept in that peace of God which passeth all the understanding, even as it far surpasses all the reasonings of the natural man. Our peace with God is only *really* maintained in *Christ*; in him who is himself "our Peace;" and in vain do we look to ourselves for a continuation and confirmation of that peace which resides only in and with him, and which he alone dispenses. And it may in addition be observed here, that the testimony of conscience in regard to the sincerity of our faith and obedience, is no suitable ground for the establishment of our peace of conscience; evangelical peace of con-

science being attainable only in one way. *The conscience must be continually sprinkled with the blood of Jesus.* For it is evident, that the self-righteous professor, who is altogether ignorant of gospel truth, may in a certain sense, and in his own estimation, endeavour to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men, and in so doing, he may enjoy a peace of mind which he would not otherwise enjoy. But is this peace at all similar, is it in the least degree akin to that peace of God which is the adjunct of justifying faith? We know that it is not. But if so, then we also know that all *the believer's* attempts to maintain a continued sense of the peace of his justification, by means of his own faithful works, are futile, and must end in disappointment. Again we repeat, the believer's peace of conscience is established only in one way: by the purging of the blood of Jesus, and by confidence in the divine mercy. Also, when the believer, partly under the law and partly under grace, reflects on his own short-comings and sad deficiencies, what does he say? 'I will be more zealous for the time to come; I will be more diligent, more fruitful in good works; and in this way I will re-establish the serenity of my conscience, which is troubled in the view of the fearful possibility, that I may at the last be weighed in the balance and found wanting.' But will such a plan succeed. A false peace may in this way be produced for a moment, but how soon will it be dissipated! For the truth still remains valid, "He is our peace;" Christ only is our peace, as it regards our sanctification as well as justification. This the fathers, who have obtained deliverance in spirit from the power of the Law, have realized, and now they repose, amidst the consciousness of their many failures, in the perfect work and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And thus they

reason with themselves. ‘Long have we sought, within and from ourselves, for the establishment of that perfect peace, which we have at last discovered can never be realized, except our minds be stayed on Christ as the Lord our righteousness. But now at length we trust in *him*. Our failures are very many, our deficiencies great. “We cannot do the things that we would.” (Rom. vii.) But what then? The Lord Christ has already performed them for us. Our sins of commission he obliterates by the washing of his blood; our sins of omission he also annihilates, by presenting us with his performance of duty in the place of our non-performance of the same.’ And with such a view of Christ’s finished work present in the heart, is not its peace established? Assuredly it is. Nor can it be established upon evangelical principles in any other way. But some will presently object—‘Upon this view of the matter, a supine carelessness may be indulged in without fear. It seems that we need do nothing, for Christ has performed all for us already.’ To which we reply, ‘Truly he has performed all for us already according to the testimony of the Scriptures, for “he has made an end of sin, and has brought in an everlasting righteousness.” But from hence the enlightened believer does not deduce the inference, that he is not bound to glorify God in his body and spirit which are His. He does not argue, Because the Lord Jesus so fully satisfied the Law for me, as to preclude the necessity of my satisfying its demands myself, therefore it is no more my “reasonable service to present my body a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God.” Nor does he say, because Christ has overcome the world for me, and tells me to be of good cheer on that account, I am therefore at liberty to be conformed to its evil principles. He only infers, that

amidst all his conscious sins and imperfections in duty, Christ is and ought to be his peace ; ever coupling with this conviction, the desire and prayer, to be holy as God is holy, and to be more and more conformed to the image of his Son. Truly the more perfect knowledge of our immunity in Christ from the constraining and condemning power of the Law, does not induce a greater sluggishness in the way of duty. Rather, when the soul is thus set free, it soars heavenward on the strengthened pinions of a more perfect love. And what, it may be asked, constitutes the spiritual fulfilment of the Law in the sight of God ? Is it not love ? We know that it is so. If love then be increased, as it must needs be, by our more ample perception and reception of gospel grace, how shall our zeal in working become diminished from this cause ? The suggestions of such fears must arise, if not from a determined perversion of the truth as it is in Jesus, at least from such a gross degree of ignorance, as indicates too surely an utter unacquaintance with the principles of Gospel sanctification. The believer who is partly under the law and partly under grace, works from the impulse of mixed principles. By the power and constraint of his regenerate nature, he loves God and serves him from a principle of love. On the other hand, being still in a measure under the coercive power of the law, which he endeavours to keep for the purpose of establishing his peace of conscience, he works, not from the constraint of love, but to do good, as he supposes, *to himself*, and to secure his own mind from disquietude. But the more advanced Christians, and those who are denominated fathers in reference to their knowledge of Christ, having ceased altogether from their own works as affording any, even the least ground of peace, now repose in their conscious

possession of the righteousness of their almighty friend, whom now they love with a more perfect love, (commensurate with their perception of his vast gift,) and desire to serve more unfeignedly and unreservedly, by the entire dedication of themselves, body, soul, and spirit to his service.

But are the fathers whom our Apostle addresses as having known him that is from the beginning, fully satisfied with this highest, last attainment of spiritual knowledge? Do they now consider themselves so wise, that they have nothing more to learn? If questioned, they will say, by no means; for we still "follow on to know the Lord." We do not count ourselves to have attained all that may be known of Jesus. Rather, we reject the monstrous thought, and desire more and more perfectly to "apprehend that, for which also we are apprehended of Christ Jesus." Still "we know but in part, and see as through a glass darkly." Our light is bright compared with what it was, but it has not yet reached its noonday splendour. Believing in Jesus, and his finished work wrought out for us, we love him, and rejoice with a joy unspeakable; but our prayer is still for larger manifestations of his grace and love; "that we may comprehend with all saints, what is its breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God."

15. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*
16. *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*

17. *And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof : but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*

“ *Love not the world,*” &c. It has been observed by a critical commentator, in connexion with this admonition, that John’s exhortation affords a proof that he did not address this epistle to the Jewish Christians in Judea and Galilee : for that after the war had commenced with the Romans, it would have been unnecessary to admonish those who were subject to so many evils not to love the world ; this caution being suited to persons in easy circumstances and in prosperity, rather than to those whose state of adversity would of itself secure them from being ensnared by the allurements which might be dangerous to others. But such a limitation must be rejected as unscriptural and untrue. The apostle’s admonition is of universal application, and alike suitable to Christians in adversity and in prosperity ; to love the world, being the natural propensity of the heart, in all circumstances and conditions of human life. And this the believer knows, for he has proved the sin and vanity of his own mind in this particular, and its proneness to over-value the things seen and temporal. Above all, the fathers in Christ are aware of the universal necessity of the admonition, for they are best acquainted with the nature and force of that twofold impulse from without and from within, which threatens, if it be not constantly resisted, to bring the believer into bondage to this present evil world. But how should such an exhortation as this of the Apostle’s, be unnecessary to suffering and persecuted Christians ? Surely there is a peculiar necessity that such should cease from the love of the world, their very lives, it may be, being in jeopardy every hour. For

the love of life is the love of the world, and the persecuted followers of Jesus may be in danger of counting their lives dear unto them. Truly all are in peril from this affection, which still cleaves to us in our present imperfect state of faith and sanctification ; and it must be mortified in us, lest it produce on our part a reluctance to depart and to be with Jesus ; an unwillingness to be absent from the body, although by that absence we obtain the presence of the Lord.

The love of the world is a love of very wide extent. It embraces all the objects of natural desire, for nothing is excluded from its grasp ; and it is excited by a sense of the present value of the things that are seen and temporal, without any reference to God as their author. Now it is evident that the world comprises, all that is in the world, the things of the world, and also the persons of the world ; although of the latter we are emphatically instructed by our divine teacher, that some are not of the world, even as he himself was not of the world, (John xv. 19 ; xvii. 14,) and these we are not only permitted, but commanded to love. (John xv. 12—17, &c.) And how awfully does our apostle enforce his admonition not to love the world, by his subsequent declaration, that “ *if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*” These words pierce deeply into the believer’s heart, and if made effective by the Holy Ghost, are “ quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, dividing asunder the soul and spirit, and judging the thoughts and intents of the heart.” How greatly does the child of God fear and tremble, lest the love of this present evil world be found in him. He knows that he has by nature a heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and that he cannot himself fathom its hidden guile.

He knows too that the love of the world is an insidious evil, which may have possession of the heart which least suspects its presence. That it is not like those sins which are open and manifest, and which necessarily at once attest their existence; but far from this, that it often lurks under a thousand specious forms, and in God's sight defiles that life and conversation, which to the eye of man may exhibit a fair show of godliness. But amidst the great searchings of heart, which are proper to the believer when he is presented with such a text as that before us, what shall he do, and how is he to reassure and compose his anxious soul? His course on all occasions of disquietude, whether from within or from without, is much the same. He betakes himself to the Lord Jesus, making a full confession of the sin of his nature, and beseeching his Saviour to undertake for him. He comes to the light, that it may be made manifest whether his works are wrought in God, and if not, that they may be re-proved. (John iii. 19, 21.) He cries out to God to examine and prove him; to search and see if there be any wicked way in him, and if there be, (as too probably there may be, and this unknown to himself,) to deliver him from it, and to lead him in the way of life everlasting. (Ps. xxvi. 2; cxxxix. 23, 24.) And in this way of commitment of his soul to God, as to a faithful Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, the believer takes courage, amidst his conscious sin, and all those fearful denunciations of the word of God which are pointed against the unsound and hypocritical professors of the faith of Christ.

But some may be disposed to ask, is there not a seeming contradiction in this exhortation and the subsequent declaration of our apostle? He exhorts be-

lievers not to love the world; and then adds, "*If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him;*" by his admonition appearing to intimate, that believers may possibly love the world, inasmuch as he warns them against it; whilst he seems presently to infer the impossibility of such a case, by adding, "*that if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him;*" i. e. that he is no believer. Certainly the apostle John is addressing believers when he says, "*Love not the world,*" &c, and these believers are the little children, young men, and fathers he had just before named as the persons to whom he wrote. But there is no contradiction implied, nor doubt inferred as to the reality of the faith of these persons. John could not suppose them to be lovers of the world, and as such to be destitute of the love of the Father. Far from this, he had just before been reminding them of their experimental acquaintance with the Father and with the Son. On the other hand, although convinced that they were not lovers of the world, he might still with the greatest propriety exhort them not to love it. In the Scriptures, believers who *have* put on Christ, are yet exhorted to put him on. Those who have already put off the old man, who is said to be corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, are nevertheless admonished to put him off. And those who are Christ's, and as such have crucified the flesh with all its affections and lusts, are still exhorted to mortify the deeds of the body, that they may live. And the fitness of all these exhortations is obvious, inasmuch as the believer, although regenerate and sanctified by the Spirit, is not altogether renewed in the spirit of his mind. The believer does not, cannot love the world, as those love it who have their portion only in this life. His con-

versation is in heaven, his affections are there, and it is there that he desires to lay up his treasures. But as he is still liable to a partial subjection to the evil influences of the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, he has to contend against these corrupt and debasing influences as long as he sojourns on this earth. And happily for him, he must of necessity contend against this earthly love, both by the constraint of his new nature, which causes his heart to be lifted up above the world, and by the operation of that faith, which unveils to him the deadly qualities of those apparent good things of the world, which he may be tempted to covet by the remaining power of the lusts they are suited to gratify. This contest, in which the child of God is engaged, makes him the fit subject for continual admonition ;—not as though his final and complete victory over the world were in any degree doubtful ; for Christ has encouraged his people in this all-important particular, by telling them to be of good cheer on the ground of his having himself overcome the world on their behalf ;—but because God has appointed that the race shall be run, before the goal is reached and the prize is awarded ; because he has decreed that fighting the good fight of faith shall precede the crowning of the victor, therefore it is expedient that the believer should bear in mind the order appointed of God, and be continually admonished as to the nature of the prescribed course. For we must never lose sight of the truth, that God who could if he pleased work altogether without means, yet is pleased to work by means : That he who does not need, in any case, the aid of instrumental causes, yet chooses to make use of them : That the same almighty Spirit, who could once for all, if he saw fit, arm the believer for the battle, and inspire him with

such a stock of wisdom and resolution, as should enable him without further instructions or exhortations, to endure to the end of the conflict, is not pleased so to do; but rather is willing, that the soldier of the Lord, so wise and so strong in the Captain of his salvation, should ascertain his continual ignorance and weakness in himself, and that in a sense of that continual ignorance and weakness, he should be ready to submit himself in humility to the instructions and exhortations of the word of God; also that he should confess his need of every line and precept, provided for him in the armoury of the scripture, and dispensed to him by those whom the Lord has set over his church, for the perfecting of the saints, and for the edifying of the body of Christ. But no doubt whilst the apostle was exhorting believers not to love the world, it is more than probable he had his eye also on those false professors of the faith "whose ungodliness doth eat as does a canker," &c, and of whom it might be affirmed with truth that the love of the Father is not in them. And it cannot be denied that in all Christian communities, sad and flagrant marks of worldly-mindedness appear. How many scruple not under various specious shows of fitness, to run into that excess of riot spoken of by the apostle Peter; basely misusing the good gifts of God. Nor is this excess of riot, and misuse of God's bounty, condemned as it should be by the ministers of the word. It is not pointed out, or acknowledged to be sin, but is even supposed to be consistent with the life of faith and godliness. In vain do the scriptures testify the awful truth, that the lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, have no portion, but of sorrow, beyond the grave. In vain does Christ himself depict in alarming characters, the doom of the rich man who

was clothed in purple and fine linen, and who fared sumptuously every day. In vain also does the Holy Ghost by our apostle affix the broad seal of God's reprobation to the love of the world, and to the indulgence of its lusts. But lest any should suppose, that only a too great love of the world is condemned, that only a too evident and monstrous luxury, and too wanton and profuse a use of temporal things, is accounted sin, let us mark the simple force of the Apostle's words. He merely says, "*If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him,*" but in so saying, he goes at once to the root of that foul disease of nature, which disposes man to love the creature, more than the Creator, who is "God over all, blessed for ever." Earthly things are not to be loved at all for their own sake ; they are to be used with thanksgiving. God is to be loved in the use of his creatures. They should all minister to his praise, by exciting in their use, emotions of gratitude and adoring love to his blessed name. The bounteous, the free, the gracious giver should be recognised in his gifts, and then it is that they are sanctified to our use, but not till then. Here is the true, the only consecration of earthly things, by which the peril of their mis-use is averted. And in vain do any cavil, and enquire, as we hear some do, apparently in derision of the believer's supposed scrupulosity, why are not the good gifts of God to be enjoyed ? adding it may be, with yet greater profaneness, in the words of the poet : ' T' enjoy is to obey.' The Christian's reply is always at hand,—and it is this : that our most liberal and gracious Father, desires our enjoyment of his creatures, as far as this enjoyment is compatible with his own glory, and our best interests. It is true that "He has given us all things richly to enjoy:" and

that the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. But still, as the earth is cursed for man's sake, and as the decree is not annulled, that we are to eat of its fruits in sorrow all the days of our life, (Gen. iii. 17, 18.) this fact of itself proves, that it is not the Creator's present intention that his earthly gifts should be to us a source of more than moderate enjoyment. And he reminds his people from time to time of his will in this particular, by causing their relish for earthly things to be embittered by seasonable draughts from the cup of tribulation, mingled by his paternal hand. To the men of the world, whom he has not chosen for his portion, he will possibly permit the sorceress to present her golden cup of unmixed delights, (Rev. xvii. 1—5; xviii. 3, &c.) and intoxicated by her potions, they may continue occupied in the inquiry, "Who will show us any good?" (Ps. iv. 6; lxxiii. 2—20; xvii. 14.) But the believer is not suffered to take up his rest on earth, but is taught, with his father Abraham, to desire a better country, that is an heavenly; and with him to look also for "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Heb. xi. 10—16.) The child of God may indeed be tempted to seek a rest here, other than that of faith; but having for a moment quitted this ark, he is presently constrained to return thither, to await in patience the period of his translation to that heavenly and eternal rest, which remaineth for the people of God. (Heb. iv. 3, 9.) And deeply aware of the importance of a heavenly mind, and of the necessity of his possessing affections disengaged from earth, the believer acquiesces in all those dispensations of his father's love, which disclose to him the vanity and comparative worthlessness of the things that are seen and temporal. He knows that all these

dealings of the Lord, painful as they may be to flesh and blood, are profitable, and most expedient; nor if he could, would he be without those rebukes and chastenings, which consume away his beauty like a moth, and cause all that is to be desired in him, to melt away. (Ps. xxxviii. 11.) Sustained then as he is in fact, by those good gifts of God which he ever receives with thanksgiving, and nourished by the bounty of that liberal purveyor, who prepares a table for him in the wilderness, he yet tastes in the vanity of the creature, (for the creature has been made subject to vanity by God himself, (Gen. iii. and Rom. viii.) so much of the wormwood and the gall, as helps to wean him from their love, and to constrain him to plead the gracious promise, and to recal the blessed hope, "Thou wilt show me the path of life—in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." "As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." (Ps. xvi. 11; xvii. 15.)

"*For all that is in the world,*" &c. The apostle proceeds to assign the reasons, why the love of the world is incompatible with the love of God. And first he shews, that the creatures of God, originally good, and still in themselves good, except for the curse brought on them by man's transgression, are now become objects of lust, instead of objects of righteous use. For in the lusts specified by the apostle, he seems by a figure of speech to denote the very things themselves, which are inordinately esteemed and basely abused by fallen men. So that "the lust of the eyes," according to this interpretation, signifies the "things seen and temporal, as opposed to things unseen and eternal," or those visible objects, which in their beholding, allure the senses

of the natural man, and cause him to depart yet further from the living God. The expression "lust of the flesh," has very much the same meaning, and denotes all the things that the carnal nature of man so affects, that they are to him objects of corrupt affection. And when the apostle affirms that none of the things thus unrighteously lusted after by natural men, are of the Father, but are of the world, he would show us, that although the things themselves are, properly speaking, the good creatures of God, they are by no means the tokens or visible emblems of that peculiar love, which God as a Father bears to his people. And it is in this sense, that they are not *of the Father*, but on the other hand, are "of the world." For the wicked possess these creatures of God, in a richer abundance for the most part, than his people possess them, to whom are dispensed, rich spiritual and heavenly gifts in lieu, it may be, of earthly things, even the good and perfect gifts which are from above, and which come down from himself, the Father of light.

With the various objects of man's carnal affection, the apostle links "the pride of life;" and this expression seems to denote that class of earthly things, which have their origin in man's vain-glorious fancy and empty vanity. For as the lusts before enumerated have respect to actually existing things, which possess as the creatures of God some degree of real value in themselves, so on the other hand, the objects which make up the pride of life are purely fictitious, and have only a nominal value, springing out of the vain ambition and unholy pride of wicked men. To the pride of life, therefore, we refer all those things which man esteems, but which are "abomination in the sight of God." The power that cometh from man only; the swelling

names of vanity with which man adorns his perishing name; his pomp and parade of earthly dignity, and all the various means by which he exalts himself above his fellows.

Let us enquire a little more particularly into the nature of the three-fold division of worldly things specified by our apostle, a division which appears in his estimation to include all the objects of man's ungodly and inordinate affections. And first, under the expression, "lust of the flesh," we must class all those things of the world which, when unduly coveted, excite to the various breaches of the law of God specified by the apostle Paul, which breaches of the law are these—"adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings," &c. And what thing is there on this earth, calculated to gratify the natural inclinations of man, that may not be proved to be the incentive to one or other of the above-mentioned forms of unrighteousness? All that man beholds, all that he tastes and handles, may be, and too often is, the occasion of sin to his depraved heart. There is no creature of God that may not become either the object of idolatry, or of impure desire, or the origin of wrath and strife, and so minister to one or other of his carnal propensities. And all things being in this way incentives to man's lust, our apostle, as before observed, transfers by a figure of speech, to the very things themselves, that property of lust, which, correctly speaking, resides only in man's fallen heart. The expression "lust of the eye," has been already interpreted to mean, the "things seen and temporal," as opposed to "things unseen and eternal;"—the things that the natural eye discerns and affects, as

distinguished from those that faith discovers and approves. But as it may be objected to this interpretation, that it is only a varied repetition of the preceding definition of the lust of the flesh, (that lust also having respect to all visible objects of desire,) another elucidation will be attempted. And it may be observed, that as the eye is the symbol of intellectual light, and also the organ by which we obtain, not only the actual sight, but the knowledge of the creatures of God, so "the lust of the eyes" may in part signify, that curious research into the principles and fabric of the external, and in a limited sense, internal world, which constitutes a species of lust apparently altogether distinct from the baser forms of sensual desire. And in that case, amongst the subjects of this more refined lust, will be the philosopher, who delights in the investigation of the physical and moral world; the poet, who celebrates its beauties and excellences both real and fictitious; and the painter, who endeavours, by means of his art, to embody his conceptions of what nature is, or might be. And should any object, that pursuits of the kind just enumerated, ought not to be branded with opprobrious epithets; it may be replied, that amidst all the objects that excite the interest of the natural man, none are excepted from condemnation in the Scripture, not because the pursuit of such objects is in itself evil or unlawful; far from it, but because to the impure and unbelieving all things are impure; their mind and conscience, (by which they should serve God,) being defiled. (Titus i. 15.) Truly we know that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and that the firmament sheweth his handy-work;" and that when his people consider his heavens, the work of his fingers, and the moon and stars which he has ordained, they are

constrained to cry out, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?" and to add, "O Lord, *our* Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" But do unregenerate men, occupied in the contemplation of nature, glorify the God of nature? Do their interesting speculations tend to promote in their hearts the love of the Creator? And do they, as they sometimes pretend, rise from nature to nature's God, adoring with suitable affections, the glorious Being whose works they are delighted to explore? It is to be feared that such cases are not only of rare occurrence, but that they do not in fact exist at all, nor can; the carnal mind being in every case enmity against God himself, however much it may admire the works of his Creation; nor, it may be added, do these works appear calculated in themselves, to excite devout affections in man's fallen heart. For whilst they exhibit astonishing displays of wisdom, and of power, and of goodness, there are still so many fearful mysteries attaching to these tokens of God's power and beneficence, that it is too probable they often excite in the unregenerate mind of the philosopher, thoughts of infidelity, rather than such an assurance of the love of God, as shall excite towards him a reciprocal affection. And it may be affirmed, without fear of contradiction from the word of God, that the love of his blessed name is never produced in the first place, by the perception of his glories, as they are displayed in the visible works of his creation. The love of God does not find an entrance through the eye or ear, or through any other of the senses, into the heart of man. Through the eye, innumerable lusts take possession of the soul, but love is produced in a far different way, than by the mere perception of external things. "The things that are seen,"

may indeed, and do, excite in *the believer's* heart, a pure love of God; for in the good creatures of God, he beholds tokens of his Father's loving-kindness and boundless generosity; and if he sees aught that is not good, and which may appear to militate against the idea of the divine beneficence, he is instructed how to interpret that evil and vanity, which by reason of man's sin, now mars the once perfect creation of God. But if the Christian, who can now adore God in the works of nature, be asked, from whence he first derived that love of God which animates his heart, he will surely say, not through the natural eye or ear, but by the "seeing and hearing of faith." He will say, "That love was shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Ghost given unto me." (Rom. v. 5.) "The Spirit of God was the divine author of that love; for, having first shown me my lost condition, as a creature under the wrath and curse of God, he afterwards revealed to me, that God so loved a lost rebellious world, as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. And this announcement, made divinely effectual by the power of the Spirit, won my heart. For I no longer doubted of my heavenly Father's love, finding it thus attested by his word, and by the feeling of my own breast. A sweet filial confidence took possession of my soul; a confidence which could never have been produced by the mere consideration of those works of nature, which too often proclaim to the terrified conscience of the sinner, the wrath of an avenging God.'

By the expression, "the pride of life," as before observed, the apostle indicates the pomps and vanities of the world, as distinguished from those creatures of God, which incite to the lust of the flesh and the lust of the

eyes ; and it was shown that this pride of life consists much in fictitious ideas of glory and of excellence, all founded in the vanity of the human heart, and having in them no reality of truth. The various forms of vain glory, which the pride of life assumes, some of which were before enumerated, will not be enlarged upon ; but it may be well to advert to one of the most subtle and least suspected manifestations of this principle of evil. And self-righteousness, the offspring of vain and unfounded self-esteem, is the form intended. A species of pride which induces a man to seek honour from his fellow men, on the ground of his faithful discharge of relative duties ; and also to challenge the reward of his good works at the hand of his Creator. For whilst some endeavour to obtain the estimation of their fellows, by their possession and display of superior wealth and earthly dignities ; and whilst others affect the reward of fame more than gold, and all the mere pomp that it can purchase ; there is another class who pride themselves upon their supposed fulfilment of the law of God, and who ground their earthly happiness upon the consciousness that their integrity of life and purity of manners commands the favour of God and the approbation of man. And it may be and often is, that this order of persons are much opposed to the external pomp and pride and vanity of life. Austerity, and a certain lowliness of demeanour, please them better than gorgeous apparel, feasts, and honourable titles. But we know that Satan exalts some of his followers upon the very ruins of that pride which they condemn. The histories of all false religions attest this ; nor has the pure faith of Christ escaped from the pollution. This "*pride of life*," one of the most specious and deadly forms of ambition, has in all ages infected the church of the living God. Per-

sons there have been at all times, and still are, who with the Pharisee mentioned in the Gospel, thank God that they are not as other men are. There are but too many who know not that they are "poor, and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked," but who on the contrary assume that they are "rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing." Their supposed good works, their zeal for God, their invocations of his name, their devotion to his service, stands them in lieu of the righteousness of God their Saviour. Of the "righteousness which is of God by faith," they are ignorant. Therefore whilst they appear zealously affected towards God and his law, and their abstinence and sanctity is apparent to all natural men, the enlightened believer who tries them in the balance of the sanctuary, finds them wanting, and discovers that "*the pride of life*" prevents them from submitting to the righteousness of God, and hinders them from gladly accepting from Jesus that holiness which he has been made unto his people: the Father's decree,—"that he that glorieth should glory only in the Lord," (1 Cor. i. 31.) being altogether overlooked by these self-seeking men.

"*And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*" The apostle now enforces his admonition to believers, not to love the world nor the things that are in the world, with an observation upon their fleeting nature. And we may notice that he not only declares that the world itself passes away, but also "*the lust thereof.*" So that even whilst the same earthly things may remain to be enjoyed, man's relish for them fades away, and he no longer covets the same pleasures which he before desired. The objects that he overvalued yesterday, will not satisfy him to-day, and the idols of to-day shall

be loathed to-morrow,—“ *The lust thereof passeth away.*” But our divinely-instructed teacher is not satisfied with noticing the brevity of earthly things, and the transient nature of man’s lusts, as a reason why believers should refrain from an over-estimation of the things that perish in the using ; he also contrasts the fleeting life of sense, with the imperishable life enjoyed by those who do the will of God. Nor is it in general of much use to advert to the brevity of life and fading nature of earthly things, except in the connexion observed by our apostle. Many sublime essays have been written, and discourses of powerful eloquence delivered, on the topic of life’s brevity and vanity. But the readers and hearers of such discourses, whilst assenting to the truth of the statement, have remained as worldly-minded as before. And for this reason :—The love of the world is only to be expelled by some other love, and it is in vain that moralists declaim against the perishable joys that nature values, whilst they are not able to impart the knowledge of a more noble and enduring life. Now this knowledge is only supplied by the revelation of that Gospel which brings life and immortality to light. And here is the true and only cure for worldly-mindedness, viz. the discovery made by faith, that in Christ we possess the promise of eternal glory : this is the only effectual antidote for that deeply-rooted disease ; that even now, Jesus manifests himself as the portion of our souls, causing us to esteem all things but loss, so that we may win Him, and be found in Him. For how vain do earthly things appear to the man in whose heart Christ is revealed by faith ! How poor the joys of time, to him who rejoices in the Lord with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. The honours, the ambition, the pride of life cannot seduce the soul, that is already by faith

“drinking of the rivers of pleasure that are at God’s right hand for evermore.” Indeed such an one prefers even the reproach of Christ to the treasures of Egypt. (Heb. xi. 26.) The evils of life, the scorn of men, all is preferred to present good, except Christ be connected with that good, and it can be enjoyed as the token of a Father’s love.

We inquire in the next place, what does the apostle mean by the expression, “he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever?” It is important to ascertain this, for surely no ordinary obedience of man can effect his deliverance from the fleeting vanity of time. What then is this will of God, which if performed, causes the individual who performs it, to abide for ever? The apostle cannot by any possibility refer to a righteousness of the law fulfilled by man, for the Holy Ghost has testified that eternal life is not a reward of debt given to him that worketh, but the reward of grace to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly.” (Rom. iv. 1, &c.) Unregenerate man cannot perform the will of God, and by that obedience live for ever; nor do the regenerate secure eternal life by their works of faith and labours of love for the name’s sake of Jesus. Then that doing of the will of God, which is connected with so vast a blessing, can be no other, than “believing on the name of the Son of God.” And most true it is that eternal life hangs on this faith. When the Jews inquired of the Lord, what they must do, that they might work the works of God, his reply is a very remarkable one. “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” And the answer given by the apostle to the jailor at Philippi, when he asked “What must I do to be saved?” is precisely to the same effect, “Believe on the Lord

Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." And we note here, that this apostolic injunction was not clogged by the addition which is now so common,—‘ Believe, but be sure you do this with a faith producing fruits of righteousness ; believe, but look well to it that sanctification goes hand in hand with justifying faith ; believe, but bear in mind that faith without works is dead.’ Neither the blessed Jesus nor his apostles teach after this manner. Their mode of proceeding is simply this—to see in the first place that the tree is made good, and “ that the inside of the cup and platter is made clean,” and this primary work being accomplished, to enforce afterwards the connexion of good fruit with a good tree, and of external, with internal purity. We must then infer, that the stability of those who do the will of God in the sense intended by John, arises from the circumstance of their having submitted themselves to that most gracious and ever-blessed counsel of God, which proclaims life to sinners upon the condition of faith. Such persons endure for ever. They are engrafted into Christ, and his life is their life. “ Because I live,” says Jesus to his disciples, “ ye shall live also.” There is no mutability for those who are one with that Christ, concerning whom it is truly affirmed, that he is “ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” No change can affect the creature who enjoys this union with his Creator ; a union, as before observed, which is immediately connected with that peculiar action of faith, which we have shewn to be in an especial degree the will of God, who no longer says to his fallen creatures, “ Do this and live,” but, “ Believe and live.” It is plain then, that to do the will of God, so that by this doing, we abide for ever, we must believe in Jesus, we must cling to Jesus, we must abide in Him, we must beseech Him to abide in us.

“Christ is our life,” our abiding, our eternal life; and if to escape from the vanity of time, and to abide for ever, appears desirable in our eyes, let us comply with the will of God, let us perform the command to “kiss the Son, lest he be angry and we perish from the way.” But as those who cavil at the annunciation of the doctrine of faith when it is simply expressed, will not cease to reiterate the question, ‘Are we then to limit the expression of doing the will of God to acting faith in Jesus?’ it may be replied, that no such limitation is necessary, for Christ has himself assured us, that “if the tree be good, the fruit will be good also,” and that “if the inside of the cup and platter be clean, the outside will be clean also:” from which declarations we infer; that if the primary act of obedience to God has been performed, other secondary acts will also be performed; so that the man who had first obeyed God by believing in his Son, will afterwards obey Him in innumerable other ways. But the after obedience of the regenerate believer, is not connected with his eternal life in the same way in which his first obedience, viz. that of faith, is connected with that life. Therefore the general doing of the will of God is not the cause of his abiding for ever. This indissoluble life is connected with faith only. Nor does life eternal hang suspended on the good works which this faith produces. Rather, the believer obtains first the gift of eternal life in connexion with his faith, and then he proceeds afterwards to work the works of righteousness, which are wrought in him by the power of the Holy Ghost.

18. *Little children, it is the last time ; and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists ; whereby we know that it is the last time.*

The beloved disciple has been contrasting the fleeting nature of this world and its lusts, with the enduring condition of those who do the will of God. He now proceeds to testify that the church of the living God has entered upon its last earthly period, so that no change of any material kind is henceforth to be expected. Our apostle affirms, "*It is the last time ;*" no new revelation of God's will is to be given ; for God who before spoke to our fathers by the prophets, —hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son. (Heb. i. 1, 2.) No more sacrifice for sin remains to be offered ; for "Jesus has already by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified. (Heb. x. 14.) The promise of the Holy Ghost has also been fulfilled ; for Jesus having been glorified, the Holy Ghost has been bestowed, and is now bestowing upon men. (Acts ii. 16—21 ; and 32, 33.) The old covenant has been abolished, and a new and enduring covenant substituted in its place. (Heb. vii. 12, &c. viii. 6 ; ix. 15 ; x. 9 ; and xii. 26—28.) What more, then, remains to prove that the gospel days are "*the last time ?*" If the shadow of heavenly things is exchanged for the substance ; if the Messiah, so long promised, has been bestowed ; if his kingdom is established amongst us, as indeed it is, by the power of his Spirit ; what further demonstration do we need in confirmation of the apostle's assertion ? The Holy Ghost is however pleased to point out to us another proof that it is "*the last time ;*"

and it is this: that the predicted Antichrist has appeared, and that too under many forms; "*even now*," says John, "*are there many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.*"

Let us first inquire, who or what may be the Antichrist of whose coming the "*little children*" had heard? And it is obvious from the context, that no particular individual could have been in the apostle's mind when he penned this address to the babes in Christ; and that no one person constituted the predicted Antichrist. On the contrary, it is apparent that the Antichrist intended, can be no other than that combined power of earth and hell, which Jesus forewarned his disciples should be armed against his church. How very many are his predictions on this subject: his discourses teem with intimations that he must be hated in the persons of his followers, even as he was hated in his own person, and that false teachers should arise to oppose and pervert the truths he had delivered. "A man's foes shall be they of his own household. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake," &c. &c. "Take heed that no man deceive you; for many false prophets shall arise and shall deceive many." Also the apostolic teachers insist much upon the warfare which should be waged against the followers of Jesus, showing that their persons must be vilified and hated of men, and their faith fraudulently assailed by means of "damnable heresies privily brought into the church;" and they testify of false teachers and seducers, who, transformed into the appearance of angels of light, should seek to beguile unstable souls, "speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples

after them." Now whatever may be the precise form of the antichristian opposition ; whether it appears in contempt and hatred of the followers of Jesus, or in subtle attempts to perplex and undermine their faith, the evil has but one origin, and one aim. Its manifestations are various, but their source is the same, and they all tend to one result ; viz. to break asunder the bands, and to cast away the cords of Jehovah's eternal counsel. (Psalm i.) Enmity against the Lord and against his anointed, alike instigate hatred of the persons, and crafty opposition to the faith, of God's elect. At one time the life-blood of the body of the saints is required ; at another time, the yet more cruel adversary thirsts for the life-blood of their immortal souls. And it would appear from the context, that our apostle adverts in the text before us, to such exhibitions of the spirit of Antichrist, as come under the latter description. This is evident from verse 26, where he adds, " these things I have written unto you, concerning them that seduce you." The Antichrists alluded to by John, are then no other than heretics, and impious teachers, who by their lying perversions of the Christian doctrine, endangered the pure faith of the disciples.

But we may properly enquire yet further into the meaning of that connexion, which the apostle points out, as existing between, "*the last time*" and the "*many Antichrists*." Because of their appearance, he says, we may certainly infer that it is "*the last time*." But why so ? Because the predictions in regard to their appearance have been fulfilled ? Assuredly ; but also for another cause. The deadly rage, the unrelenting enmity, the proud contempt, the cruel subtilty displayed by men and devils, mark clearly that they are conscious " it is the last time." (Rev. xii. 12.) The God of this world

is not ignorant of the fact that he is already judged and cast out, and that ere long he will be bruised beneath the feet of the saints. (John xvi. 11 ; and xii. 31. Rom. xvi. 20.) "The powers and principalities and rulers of the darkness of this world," are aware that they are spoiled, and that Jesus has openly triumphed in their shame. (Col. ii. 15.) And the children of the wicked one, instigated by their father the devil, are well enough disposed to attempt the extirpation of the favoured race, concerning whom the purposes of Jehovah, but faintly indicated before, are in these last days fully disclosed. (Gen. iii. 15 ; and xii. 2, 3, &c. compared with Luke xii. 32 ; xxii. 29 ; and Matt. xxv. 34, &c.) And can we be surprised that all hell from beneath should be moved to oppose this last, highest revelation of God's love to man ? A revelation which involves in it the present discomfiture, and ultimate destruction of our great adversary ? And can any thing be conceived more hopeless and galling to the malice of the wicked one, than those free terms of sovereign grace which God has prepared under the new dispensation of the gospel, for the acceptance of a people made willing in the day of his power ? That a people shall be plucked as brands from the burning, by the strong arm of omnipotent grace, so that Satan shall in no wise be able to retain his captives, is a revelation of God's will, which makes hell tremble in its lowest depths. The gospel declaration, that this people shall be saved, not of works, but by grace, and through faith, shakes to its foundation, the throne of the tyrant of this earth. Had but a single good work of any description, been required of this people, as the condition of their safety, the arch-traitor would have held his peace. Had faith been enjoined in the first place as necessary to justifica-

tion, and had good works been annexed as alike necessary to prove the validity of the former justification, so that the gift of eternal life should not be made over to the sinner upon his believing in Jesus, but held in reserve till he had proved the reality of his faith by his works; were such even the terms of the gospel grace, Satan would not stir up so many adversaries to oppose it. On the former supposition he would know, that man is incapable of rendering to God any one act of perfect obedience; on the latter he would know, that if the gift of eternal life were suspended upon the outward proofs of the reality of faith, that in that case, the hands and heart of the believer would be paralyzed, and that he would be without the strength which arises from joy in the Lord. But as matters now stand between God and the recipients of his grace, how hopeless is the contest which Satan wages with his former vassals! And it is this that provokes his deadliest rage. Shall he convict believers of sin? He may easily do this; but to what purpose? for we read, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." Shall he prove their destitution of righteousness? This too will be effected without difficulty; but to what end? for Christ says, "I bring near my righteousness." (Isaiah xxvi. 13.) Shall he attempt to pluck them back again by force from the hand of Jesus? He may do this also. He may, perhaps, stimulated by his impotent malice, make the attempt. But a vain attempt it must be, for Jesus has said, "I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." We may discern now, in part at least, the ground of that

peculiar anti-christian enmity, which is connected with "*the last time*," for no fire bursts out on earth, which is not first kindled in hell. But the same doctrine of "*the last time*" which so eminently confirms and illustrates the ancient sentence pronounced upon the wily serpent, "Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life," is no less abhorred upon earth, than in hell itself. Strange to say, the doctrine of the free grace of God, in the recovery of Satan's captives by the victorious arm of Christ, is a truth which is most loathsome to unregenerate man. The devils who lose their prey through man's belief of the gospel, can scarcely hate its tidings more unfeignedly and heartily, than do those very beings themselves, whom it is destined to relieve, and to embrace with everlasting mercy. And the consideration of this awful fact, may assist us to enlarge our conceptions of the depth of our fall in Adam. It appears incredible and monstrous that we should condemn the Saviour who died for us. That we should scorn the proffered grace of God and make a mock of his love and his promises. But we do all this, till our hearts are subdued and enlightened by the Holy Ghost. More than this, not only will man refuse the grace of God himself; he will persecute all who accept of it. Hatred of the doctrine itself, is transferred to the persons of those who embrace it; and so, men in league with devils, put forth their strength against the counsel and church of the great God. There is no want of unity in this war; the antichrists are of different natures, the angelic and the human; but in their opposition to Jesus they are of one mind; no diversity of thought or purpose exists; all is hostility to Christ and his saints.

19. *They went out from us, but they were not of us ; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us ; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*

It seems from John's declaration in this verse, that the Antichrists to whom he had just alluded, were professors of Christianity, for he says, "*They went out from us.*" Whether nurtured in the faith of Christ from their infancy, or admitted into the visible church upon that confession of faith which adults were in those days wont to make previous to their baptism, we have no opportunity of deciding. One thing alone is clear; these persons were at one time Christians by name, and apparently of the body of the faithful. "*But they were not of us,*" adds our Apostle. They had only a name to live; they were not living members of the true vine. Their specious appearance deceived us for a while, and we supposed them to be possessed of the same Lord, of the same faith, and of the same Baptism as ourselves. We perceive, however, that it was not so. The fact of their departure from the true faith, establishes another fact, and an important one it is; viz, that these antichrists were never at any time really inserted into Christ as "members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." "*For if they had been of us,*" says John, "*they would no doubt have continued with us.*" What then is the inference in regard to these persons? Their profession was indeed at one time fair, but they have ceased to witness a good confession; and not only so, they have now become the open enemies of Jesus. Can it be then, that they were ever truly of his household? Impossible; for had they been so,

they would have continued of our number. Too true it is, then, that they were never Christ's !

It is a melancholy truth, ever prominent in Scripture, and attested in ecclesiastical history, that the most inveterate opposers of the faith of Christ, and the most deadly of his peoples' adversaries, have borne his honoured name, and it may be, have even boasted in the same. How many a wound has not Jesus received in the house of his reputed friends ! (Zech. xiii. 6.) And how many the insults heaped upon his sacred person by those who have called him Lord ! In his very temple, the place dedicated to his rightful worship, the impious antichrist has dared to exalt himself in lieu of Christ. That foulest of all the forms of daring enmity to Jesus, the "Man of Sin," under the garb of piety, has most audaciously thrust Christ from his throne, and has taken possession of his seat. (2 Thess. ii. 24.) But it is most happy for us, (and let the Lord's name be praised for this,) that the existence of these antichrists has been clearly set before us in the Scripture. There is no reason then that we should be dismayed at their appearance. Rather, because they have abounded, and do still abound, our faith should gather strength. Instead of saying, 'from whence is it that these agents of the wicked one infest the sanctuary, and lay waste the altar, and bring desolation to the saints ?' we should rather say, Behold the fulfilment of the Scriptures ; God has decreed that it should be so. It is his will that a Judas should for a time be numbered with the twelve Apostles ; that Demas for a time should be the fellow-labourer of Paul. Nor is it without his appointment that heresies abound for the trial of his peoples' faith, (1 Cor. xi. 19.) and that false brethren creep in unawares, to prove the constancy of those who

are bound to "hold fast the form of sound words," (received from Apostolic teaching,) in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." (1 Tim. i. 1—13.)

"*But they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us :*" that is, These anti-christ's were, in the Lord's providence, permitted, or rather to speak more accurately, caused, to manifest the unsoundness of their Christian profession, in order that they might no longer be mistaken for members of Christ's mystical body. And it is to be considered a special mercy of the Lord, when the hidden and secret enemies of the faith, make at last a distinct and open display of their hostility to Jesus. This is far better, than that they should hypocritically bend the knee before that Christ, whose faith they are insidiously proposing to undermine. And no doubt the Lord impels them oftentimes, to speak thus openly, that they may proceed no further in those covert schemes of mischief, by which the hearts of his simple followers might be deceived. (2 Tim. iii. 8, 9.)

It remains for us to consider the very important doctrine contained in this verse : a doctrine precious to the believer's heart, the cordial of his faith, the support of his troubled spirit; for it tells him that if he is in Christ, he shall *continue* one with him, that if he is one spirit with the Lord, "neither life, nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, can separate him from that love of God," which has been manifested to him in the gift of a dying, risen Jesus. Oh, sweet and much needed assurance for tried souls ! Oh, most comfortable truth, without which our fainting hearts are ready to despond, and our faltering tongues to give utterance to the melancholy words, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." And say, ye followers of Jesus, such of

you as are opposed to the blessed knowledge of the perpetuity of the faith of God's elect, how are ye so strong as to dispense with this *elixir vitæ* ? The wisest of natural men, under the inspiration also of a wisdom which was supernatural, has said, " Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts ; let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." (Prov. xxxi. 6, 7.) But ye say, " such a cordial as the doctrine of God's enduring love in Christ, is not needed, nay, it is pernicious to the believer's soul." And for you indeed, ye stout-hearted ones, it may not be expedient that ye should be instructed in the knowledge of the believer's security in God his Saviour, for it would seem that ye are not oftentimes " ready to perish," ye are not wont to be " of heavy hearts ;" ye have no sense of poverty to forget, no misery, that it is expedient ye should remember no more. Nevertheless, suffer such of the saints as are in the lamentable case described by " the words of the wise, and their dark sayings," to " understand a proverb and the interpretation thereof." (Prov. i. 6.) This knowledge, to you apparently useless, and worse than useless, may be blessed to their poor feeble souls. Ye may not care to know, that the Father's love is as immutable as it is free ; (Mal. iii. 6.) that Christ having loved his own, loves them to the end ; (John xiii. 1, and James xxxi. 3,) and that Jesus, who is the author, is also the finisher of his people's faith. (Heb. xii. 2.) But suffer those who might perish for lack of this knowledge, to embrace it. Permit the feeble-minded to be thus succoured. (1 Thess. v. 14.) Allow *them*, if not yourselves, to draw water out of these wells of salvation. (Isa. xii. 2, 3.)

In opposition, however, to the views of those, who

not only express a doubt whether the doctrine of the perpetuity of the faith of God's elect should be publicly proclaimed to believers, but who also affirm that it is an unscriptural tenet ; it must now be observed, that the apostle John appears to have had no doubt at all, as to this (alas ! that it should be so,) disputed point. He says plainly, ' If the antichrists had really been of our number, they would NO DOUBT *have continued* with us.' Can any thing be more explicit than this declaration : here is a plain sentiment distinctly expressed. It is impossible to torture the apostle's words, so as to make it appear that *he* doubted in the stability of the " precious faith," which those obtain, who are the heirs of the promises. He positively affirms the contrary. And having his testimony on our side, let us not forget that this testimony is no merely human opinion, John wrote under the inspiration of a heavenly teacher ; he was the amanuensis of the Holy Ghost.

But the beloved disciple does not in the passage before us, enter at all into the reasons of the conviction he expresses. He affirms the truth positively, leaving it however to the reader to substantiate its correctness, both from other statements of his own, to be found elsewhere in his writings, and also from the testimonies to this doctrine, which are contained in all parts of holy writ. And the gospel which bears our apostle's name, does of itself abound in corroborations of the precious truth under consideration. The discourses of Jesus which John records, are full of intimations, that he bestows on his people the gift of an imperishable faith. For he says distinctly, that he " gives unto his sheep eternal life," and that " they never perish, none having any power to pluck them out of his hand." In the case of Peter, he sets before us one reason why that apostle

could not be a cast-away like Judas. He says to Peter, in the foreknowledge of his sin about to be committed, " I have prayed for thee, that thy faith should not fail." And of all his people it is written, " he ever liveth to make intercession for them ;" (Heb. vii. 25.) therefore the faith of all will be maintained, as certainly as was Peter's faith. " Because I live," says Jesus, " ye shall live also." (John xiv. 19.) St. Paul also, to the same effect, affirms, that if " when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life ;" (Rom. v. 10.) that is, by his present life of intercession for us at God's right hand. (Heb. vii. 25.) But to what end shall we multiply distinct texts to prove a point which the whole context of the Bible establishes so unequivocally, that subtract this doctrine from the Scripture, and all that shall remain of the wonderful revelation of God's grace to men, shall be vague, unmeaning and profitless ? Take away from the word of God the doctrine of the perseverance of true believers, and the grace of God becomes a thing of nought, impotent and vain ! All do not see this, but it is not the less true on that account. Many souls shall reach the courts above, ransomed by the blood of Jesus, and quickened by his spirit, who have known nothing of this truth ; who have, it may be, opposed it, through their defective mental illumination. But it is still true, that the actual possession of eternal life on the part of any soul of man, rests upon this one point of the perpetuity of his faith, by the alone grace of the Father and the Son. For imagine grace to be bestowed in any individual case, by the free and preventing love of God. Imagine a man truly invested with the precious gift of faith, according to the will of the most high God ; and what is the condition of that

person? Is he not a child of God; and according to the testimony of the Scriptures, an heir of all the promises, and amongst them of life eternal? We cannot deny that so it is; that such is the rich grace bestowed upon this favoured child of man, such the nature of the gift of the faith he has received, that in that one gift, all other gifts are contained. The man believes, in virtue of the faith vouchsafed to him, and believing, becomes an heir of glory. And the very same grace which first imparted the gift of faith, secures its continuance. For to assert the contrary, as before observed, reduces the grace of God to a mere fiction, to an empty unmeaning name. For when God of his mere grace and sovereign good pleasure has seen it fit to bestow on any soul the faith which he has himself linked with the possession of righteousness and eternal life, is it conceivable that he should again revoke his first purpose of grace, so as to be unwilling to perpetuate the faith which he gave for the specific end, that it might issue in the salvation of that soul? We are "kept," says St. Peter, "by the power of God, through faith unto salvation." (1 Peter i. 5.) The "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time," is the inheritance prepared for the saints. And in order that they may obtain the kingdom "prepared for them before the foundation of the world," faith is in due time given them of God. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." But God will make his people acceptable to himself, as well as accepted in the Beloved, and therefore he gives them faith. And the primary end of the first bestowment of the gift of faith, being the final salvation of those who receive it, by no possibility can we imagine that the Lord will frustrate his own counsel of grace, by ceasing to perpetuate the faith which he has once bestowed. For the very same rea-

son, and no other, that he first gave faith, he maintains it in the soul. He gave it of his mere mercy; he sustains it of the same mercy. The Lord was yesterday minded to give the faith of his elect to a poor sinner; to-day he is alike disposed to perpetuate the same faith; and to-morrow he will renew again the same heaven derived principle. For the salvation of that soul is the work that is contemplated by the divine workman, and it is thus he carries on his heavenly workmanship. And does not the Lord know full well, as do his saints, who know any thing of their own weak and sinful selves, that except he should thus carry on the work of faith with a divine power, no soul of man would obtain the future recompense of reward promised to his people? In vain would faith be bestowed to-day; to-morrow the promise of eternal life would be bartered for a mess of pottage. But this the Lord interposes to prevent. He will give eternal life to some, therefore to them he will also give the gift of faith; and in the hearts of these same persons he will perpetuate the precious gift, so that they shall continue to the end, and thus be saved; the Lord accomplishing in this way his own eternal purpose of the salvation of an elect people in Christ. Truly, the whole scheme of man's salvation in Christ, by the gratuitous favour and alone mercy of God, falls utterly to the ground, if this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, depending as we suppose it to do, on the sole mercy of God, be rejected from our creed. If this truth be lost, we stand henceforth on the basis of our own strength, a strength partly divine, but partly human. We rest no longer on the immutable counsel of an unchanging God, but upon our own faithfulness to grace received; and may we not justly exclaim, ' Miserable exchange of infinite strength for

finite weakness ! miserable exchange of the unchanging will of God, for the changing will of man ! But will the weak saints who know themselves to be but bruised reeds and smoking flax, will they consent to this exchange ? Impossible, for in so doing, they will know that they reject the counsel of God against themselves. No ; far from this, they will cling yet more closely to this cheering truth, and will suspect as cruel foes, all who would rob them of their confidence in the free and unchanging grace of their Almighty friend. And did not weak believers need much assurance on the subject of their final perseverance, so much would not be vouchsafed them in the Scripture ; for the Lord suits the gracious supplies of his word to our necessities. We infer also from the prominence of this doctrine in the inspired record of his will, that it is a most salutary and important one to the tried saints, who wrestle not only with flesh and blood, but with powers and principalities, with the rulers of the darkness of this world, with spiritual wickedness in high places. And let such be assured, that as the Lord did not in the first place select his people on account of any peculiar worthiness which they possessed in themselves, so he cannot possibly cease to love them on account of the imperfections of their life of faith. Did God first love us in the contemplation of our virtues ? None will presume to say that he did so. Then why should he forsake us in the after consideration of our sins ? When was it that the Lord first claimed us as his own ; and when did he first manifest that he had set his love upon us ? Surely, when we were “ dead in sins, and the uncircumcision of our flesh.” Then why imagine that our subsequent transgressions should provoke him to cast off those whom he foreknew with so great a previous love ? If

our death in sin did not prevent us from being the objects of the divine regard, why should a less measure of iniquity subject us to so dire an evil? God was pleased to love us when we were his enemies, and shall he cease to love us, when from enemies he has himself changed us into friends? On no imaginable ground can *sin* be the cause of the final overthrow of any who are inserted into Christ by a true faith. It might be their overthrow, but the Lord interposes to prevent a result, which he is unwilling should take place. And how does he prevent the result, the bitter end, which but for his interposition, sin must ever bring along with it? He gives more grace, more faith. He gives correction and the rod; he embitters sin. He shews it in its true colours to the soul, and by the power of his spirit he makes holiness increasingly lovely and attractive, so that the believer is constrained to follow after it with a most willing mind. "The wages of sin is death," that is, of unrepented, unforsaken sin. But the Lord does not suffer those whom he will save with an everlasting salvation, to remain impenitent in the commission of any sin. The tenor of the new covenant makes that impossible, for God proclaims there his purpose of giving to his people "a heart of flesh," upon which he will write his law. And this heart of flesh is easily convinced of sin, and bitterly laments, whilst it frankly confesses its many acts of disobedience committed against the Lord of life and glory.

In connexion with our present subject, how awful is the consideration of the length some may go in an apparent life of faith, whilst they are not really plants of the heavenly Father's planting! And the contemplation of such a case strikes terror to the believer's heart. He sometimes fears greatly, and his heart misgives, lest

he too should be deceived, and at last fall short of life eternal ! When he considers his many sins, committed against knowledge, against grace ; and his many sad omissions in the way of duty ; when he casts an eye on what he has done, and on what he has left undone, he cries out in bitterness of soul, " Lord, save me, or I perish." But let not such an one cast away his confidence which hath great recompense of reward. Rather, let him plead with God as with a father, and let him supplicate for larger measures of the Holy Ghost. Let him tell the Lord all the fears and troubles of his soul ; and above all, let him solemnly commit his justly forfeited but again restored life, into the hands of the Father and the Son. Let him thus plead with God. " My Father, thou hast called me to thyself, thou hast caused me to desire greatly to be thine. Thou hast shed abroad thy love in my heart by the Holy Ghost given unto me, and hast revealed thy Son within me as the hope of glory. But I read in thy word, " he that endureth to the end shall be saved." Oh, my Father, I fear greatly lest I should prove at last a cast away : left to myself, I shall do this. But interpose, my God, in my behalf. I put my trembling soul into thy hands : keep that which I commit to thee unto the last day. Let neither sin nor Satan prevail against me, but make me more than a conqueror through him that hath loved me." Truly of all the exercises of faith, none is more important, than the committing of the soul to Jesus, in the consciousness of our own utter inability to keep ourselves. And this surrender of ourselves into the Lord's care, cannot but be altogether according to the will of God. He would have us, his impotent children, to lay hold on His strength ; surely he is well pleased when we do this. But in coming to the Lord, to commit our

souls to him, that they may be kept unto eternal life, let us remember that our heavenly Father will keep them in his own way, that is, according to his covenant. He will not so keep the feet or souls of his saints, as that they shall enjoy their portion in this life, and also in the life to come ; but he will keep their souls, in chastisements, in tribulations, in reproof, in the dishonour of the world, and in the loss of all things for Jesus sake. Truly the Lord will keep the souls that are committed to his guardianship, and to this end will accomplish in them, and for them, the crucifixion of the world and of sin. And do the souls thus "kept by the power of God through faith, unto salvation," desire to be preserved only in a way of ease, and worldly pleasure? Not so; they have but one thing at heart; their ultimate salvation: and the way in which this salvation is to be effected, they willingly entrust with their gracious God. They do not prescribe to him the means that he shall use. These they leave to his wisdom. It may be that they have many a foreboding, that "strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life," but they are not on that account, of the number of those who draw back unto perdition. Their only fear is lest that perdition should ever overtake them; and to prevent that disastrous issue, they count not their lives dear unto them, but willingly resign them, with all their earthly interests, into the hands of that God who has promised to "make all things work together for good to those who love him, to those who are the called according to his purpose."

We have adverted to the case of those who oppose the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, and have admitted, that although through a deficiency of divine illumination, combined with the force of prejudice, a

certain class of believers reject this precious truth, they yet possess saving faith in Jesus, and the renewing influences of his grace. But allowing this to be the case, it is also apparent, that none can give a rational and intelligible account of their first conversion to God, or of their hope of future glory, upon Arminian principles. For the pious Arminian dares not ascribe either his first conversion to God, or his hope of final perseverance, to his own faithfulness to grace received ; which he ought to do, in order to be consistent with himself. Press him on this point, and you will find, that in spite of his false creed to which he holds most pertinaciously in the letter, he is constrained by the power of the Spirit, (which he possesses in common with his Calvinistic brethren) to give God the glory of his own work. If pointedly asked, ‘ How is it that you are become a child of God ? were you originally better than your neighbours ; or did you by the power of your own free will pluck yourself as a brand from the burning, even when you were dead in trespasses and sins ? ’ The reply to such an inquiry is ever this, “ By the grace of God I am what I am.” True, the pertinacity of the Arminian creed will still suggest the general retort, ‘ that there is a time in which every man may or may not comply with the grace of God ; ’ but if the general truth is pushed home and made particular, the conscience of the really humbled sinner, discloses to him that in *his* case, salvation was of grace. And in like manner, whilst the pious Arminian contends stoutly, that the grace of God which is bestowed to-day, may through the believer’s fault be withdrawn to-morrow, we observe him secretly cherishing a confidence in God, that the same grace that first called him to the possession of faith, will perpetuate the precious gift. In fact the feelings

and wants of the renewed heart being ever in a great measure the same, those who differ in words are found to agree in sentiment; and whilst those who "hold fast the form of sound words," are contemned, it may be, on account of their doctrine, their adversaries (if taught of God) are constrained to join them, in ascribing their individual salvation to the same free, almighty, efficacious grace of God.

20. *But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*

21. *I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.*

These verses may be paraphrased in the following manner:—"And truly ye believers, to whom I write, have an unction from the Holy one, and in consequence of that heavenly anointing, possess such a comprehensive knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, that ye will accede at once to the accuracy of the statement I have just made in regard to the final perseverance of those who are in Christ. This statement might be objected to, by those who are little conversant with the whole scheme of man's redemption in Christ; but I have not written to you, as to those who are ignorant of all save the first rudiments of the Gospel. On the contrary, I have rather addressed you, as persons to whose knowledge and experience I can appeal, in confirmation of what I have advanced. And ye know that no lies like unto those put forth by the antichristian teachers, can possibly emanate from him who is "the truth;" consequently that the teachers of antichristian doctrines,

could not by any possibility have received a commission from the Great Head of the Church, whose body (the Church) they do nothing else but wound, by their perversions of the faith once for all delivered to the saints."

Let us now consider in greater detail the important matter contained in these verses. "*But ye have an unction from the Holy One.*" Here the Apostle asserts a very important fact respecting the persons to whom he wrote; a fact which if it is supposed to exist at the present time in the case of some Christians rather than of others, brings with it the imputation of credulity, or the reproach of arrogance. But John is explicit in his terms. We must not then be afraid to acknowledge that he asserts that some in his time possessed a peculiar gift of the Spirit of God, whilst others were destitute of the same gift; for whatever any may think of the present pretensions of those who consider themselves or others similarly endowed, the case of the believers whom John addressed cannot be disputed, without attacking the apostle's truth, or impeaching the soundness of his judgment. But if whilst we assent, or rather, it is to be feared, pretend to assent, to the accuracy of this statement in regard to the believers he particularly addressed, and at the same time, which is so common a case, oppose the general truth, that the same peculiar unction from the Holy One is given to all true believers, now, and in every age of the church, we are in no other condition but the very perilous one, of being found "even to fight against God." We repeat, that this is no unusual case. Alas! it is but too common; for how is the doctrine of the agency of the Spirit in the hearts of a peculiar people, vilified by the carnal mind, and railed at even by those who bear the name of Christ! To proclaim that some

possess "*an unction from the Holy One,*" whilst others are destitute of any such anointing, excites at once the enmity and contempt of man's fallen heart. Some will indeed endure to hear of a general work of the Spirit upon all, which work of the Holy Spirit shall not be distinguishable from what is commonly called the light of nature; but let those particular operations of the Spirit be insisted on, which are identical with the birth from above, (John iii. 3—8.) and although Jesus is himself the author of the doctrine, it is rejected with real, although, it may be, with disguised contempt. The believer however, who is himself the subject of this heavenly unction, cannot, and will not, be disposed to dispute it. Rather, he will humbly glorify God in the acknowledgment of the unspeakable mercy he has received, and pray evermore for larger measures of the divine anointing. Nor can he deceive himself, as some suppose, by imagining himself partaker of a gift which is delusive. His possession of a new nature, substantiates the fact of his being born again of the Spirit. He has within him the evidence that a mighty change has been wrought in his heart and mind, by a power foreign to his own. For from whence was it that he derived his present knowledge of himself, as by nature a child of wrath, a sinner, and as such under the righteous sentence, and curse of God? There was a time when such a conviction had no place in his mind. How did he obtain it? And from whence his views of Jesus as the propitiation for his sins? From whence his love of God, and his unfeigned delight in the meditation of his law? His present thoughts and feelings are all new. But how is this? "*Old things are passed away:*" but by what power was this effected? He was formerly the willing slave of his lusts. Now he detests

their bondage. Once he loved the world supremely ; now his affections are at God's right hand, and not on things on the earth. (Col. iii. 1, 2.) Formerly he was greatly disquieted in the fear of evil, and bore the evils of life with an unwilling mind. But now, " his heart standeth fast, trusting in the Lord : " he reckons that, " his present light afflictions which are but for a moment, shall work out for him, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," and in this confidence of faith he endures quietly, if need be, the loss of all things. Truly the subject of so entire an alteration in heart and mind, cannot ascribe the change he has undergone to the mere effect of natural events or external circumstances. Even the word of God, which depicts such a change of nature, cannot of itself produce it. There needs some agency over and above that of any natural power, to stem the tide of nature herself, and to turn back the current of her affections. Nature must be controlled by nature's God, before she will consent to meditate upon herself and her own fallen state. And as for external things, and impressions from without, they cannot by any possibility produce a new internal life. The immediate work of God himself is needed here. The Scripture also, although it is the instrument employed by God in the creation of the new man, cannot of itself achieve any such creation. The same Holy Spirit who indited the word, must accompany its truth with a divine energy to the sinner's heart. The Holy Ghost must himself implant the incorruptible seed of the word within the soul, (1 Pet. i. 2, 3 ; and James i. 18.) or that word of God, so mighty in accomplishing that for which it is sent, (Isa. lv. 10, 11. Jer. xxiii. 29.) will be as powerless as the word of a mere man would be, were he to tell the dead to arise

and live. (Ezek. xxxvii. 1—14.) Let us then confess, in humility of heart, that a peculiar unction of the Holy One is truly needed by every man born of corruptible flesh, in order that he may become a partaker of a new and heavenly life. (John iii. 3, 8.)

We inquire now, who is "*the Holy One*" specified by our apostle, as the giver of the divine anointing ; and to whom are believers indebted for this precious gift. We reply, that in the passage before us, "*the Holy One*" appears to designate that gracious Lord, who in virtue of his obedience unto death, overcame death, "led captivity captive, and received gifts for men, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell amongst us." Jesus is then "*the Holy One*" intended, and "of his fulness have all we received." For he it is, who imparts the baptism of the Holy Ghost, (Matt. iii. 11 ; and Acts ii. 32, 33) as his forerunner has declared. And "*the unction*" bestowed by Jesus, is no other than the gift of the Spirit itself, even the gift of that indwelling deity of which Paul speaks, when he declares believers to be "temples of the Holy Ghost." Some indeed imagine "*the Holy One*," mentioned in this verse, to be the Third, rather than the Second person in the Trinity ; and "*the unction*" they suppose to be the gift imparted by the Spirit, and not the Holy Ghost himself. We are, however, at all times safe in referring the bestowment of every spiritual gift, to Him, who is constituted the "Head over all things to his church ;" nor are we liable to err, in identifying the gift of the Spirit with the Holy Ghost himself. For we cannot in this case divide properly between the gift, and "the divine nature," of which we are made partakers. (2 Peter i. 4.) If the Lord Jesus raise our souls from a death in sin to a new life of righteousness, he does this by the

quickening agency of the Holy Ghost. But what is that agency? Is it the mere power of God, or of his Son, put forth on our behalf? By no means. For the power of the Father and the Son is identical with that glorious being whom we worship as the Third Person in the adorable Trinity. There is indeed in this matter a mighty and deep mystery, baffling all our powers of research or of comprehension ; but still the scripture testifies, that where Jesus bestows the saving gifts of his Spirit, there the Holy Ghost is himself present. We suppose then, that Christ is the giver of "*the unction*" in question, he being "*the Holy One*" intended in the text, (Acts ii. 22, 23.) and that the gift he bestows, is no other than *the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, as a Spirit of divine illumination, of faith, and of love.* For "*the unction*" intended by the apostle cannot be a mere influence, as before observed ; and that it is not so, we also infer from the subsequent language of our apostle in verse 27, where he again speaks of "*the anointing*" which those he addressed had received "*from him,*" that is, from "*the Holy One ;*" an anointing, which he proceeds to show, remains in them ; and itself teaches them of all things. We see then that to this unction, the work of the Holy Ghost is ascribed ; for he it is, who according to the express promise and testimony of Christ, is the teacher of his people, and their guide into all truth. (John xiv. 16, 17, and 26 ; xv. 26 ; and xvi. 12—15.) We repeat then, that we cannot properly divide between this "*unction,*" and the Holy Ghost himself ; and seeing that it is so, let us acquiesce in the fitness of that two-fold phraseology of scripture, which instructs us that the Holy Ghost is himself our heavenly Teacher, whilst at the same time he is the gift bestowed upon us by the Father and the

Son. Nor let us account it an ambiguous form of speech, or one tending to bring into dispute the fact of the personality of the Spirit, that the Holy Ghost should be spoken of under the emblem of a thing diffused or shed abroad, as in the text before us, and as in Acts ii. 17, 18, and 33. Rather let us confess our utter ignorance of the actual mode of the Spirit's operations, (John iii. 8.) and our incompetence to pass a judgment on the suitableness of the terms employed in scripture in reference to the person and work of the Holy Ghost. Above all, let us fear greatly, not only lest we be found fighting against God, by indulging ourselves in cavils against his word ; but lest we should haply be found guilty of the dire, the irretrievable offence of speaking aught against the Holy Ghost. (Matt. xii. 32.) True it is, that that alarming sin is not necessarily connected with doubts even of the personality or actual existence of the third person of the Godhead. For the very essence of this fearful sin consists *in a malicious determination* to reject the truth of God, *however clear and overpowering its evidence to the mind* ; and as we know that much ignorance and unbelief may exist without any such determined malice, we infer, that hard thoughts of the scripture phraseology in regard to the work of the Spirit, and doubts as to his person, may eventually be overcome by the grace of Christ, and by the operations of that very Spirit of God, whose work is suspected, and whose person is opposed. Still, we repeat, let us keep at the greatest distance from the possibility of the horrible downfall, indicated by Jesus in Matt. xii. 32. by submitting ourselves in lowliness of mind to the revelation of God's word ; beseeching him first of all, and continually, to make us willing to be taught, and then that he will open our understanding that we

may understand the scriptures. (Psalm cx. 3; and Luke xxiv. 45.)

"And ye know all things." The apostle now instructs us in the result produced by that "*unction from the Holy One*" which his true disciples receive. They "*know all things.*" But this appears at first sight a startling affirmation, and did it not come to us on apostolic authority, we might be disposed at once to reject it. As it is, let us inquire into the meaning of the words. And they clearly imply, even if not taken precisely in the letter, a most comprehensive knowledge. Their spirit imports that true believers are acquainted with all scriptural and revealed truth;—with the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; with themselves; and with the nature of this present world. Nothing that is revealed in scripture is concealed from their knowledge, for the same Spirit that indited the scriptures being their guide into all truth, He puts them in possession of a key which unlocks all the treasures of the word of God. Moreover he speaks to them in their inmost souls; and by the internal illuminations of his grace, all of which coincide with the scripture testimony, he makes them wise unto salvation. Certainly it may be affirmed in a true sense, even of the least instructed of the flock of Christ, that they "*know all things.*" For in comparison with the children of this world, who are in absolute darkness, and whose understandings are altogether blinded, their knowledge may well be called entire. And it is highly probable that the apostle had something of a contrast in his mind, when he penned the words of the text. He had just before been speaking of the antichrists who were not born of the Spirit, and then appeals to those who were partakers of the heavenly gift; and the spiritual illuminations of these

latter persons was so great when compared with the mental darkness of the former, that he might properly address them as in the words of the text, "*But ye know all things.*"

Let us endeavour to enumerate more particularly a few of the "*all things*" which those are said to know, who "*have received an unction from the Holy One.*" John has already specified in some of the former verses of this chapter, certain branches of this knowledge; viz. acquaintance with the Father and the Son; (verse 13, &c.) and it might be shown that all other knowledge is included in these two particulars. A more simple and obvious form of exposition will, however, be resorted to in the proposed detail. And we are reminded by Holy Writ, that conviction of sin is the first knowledge bestowed upon the child of wrath, whenever the Spirit of the Holy One comes to take possession of the alien, with the intention of ultimately translating him from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son. (John xvi. 8.) But how is this conviction of sin effected by the Spirit of God; or by what means does the Holy Ghost produce this knowledge in the hitherto darkened understanding? St. Paul informs us, that "by the law is the knowledge of sin;" from which we gather that the law of God is the instrument by means of which the Holy Ghost produces in the sinner's heart, conviction of his sin. Nor is this statement at variance with the fact, that multitudes of persons who are still "dead in sins and the uncircumcision of their flesh," are well acquainted with this letter of the law of God, and also profess to honour it. True it is, "they have the form of knowledge and of the truth of the law," but the power of the law has never reached their hearts. In order that it should do this, a peculiar agency of the

Holy Ghost is required ; for he it is who makes the law of God “ quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword,” so that it becomes not only “ a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart,” but “ pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit,” utterly slaying the convinced sinner, who now finds death to be wrought in him by that law which was ordained to life, and which is in itself holy, and just, and good. (Rom. vii. 9.) Should any ask, why a peculiar work of the Holy Ghost is required for the conviction of souls already enlightened as to their duty by the possession of the law of God, when the very heathen are said to have the law written in their hearts, and that even their comparatively darkened conscience either excuses or condemns them ; (Rom. ii. 14, 15.) we reply, that the conviction of sin which accompanies salvation, is a far different thing from any ordinary illumination of the natural mind in regard to its violations of the law of God. There is confessedly in the heart of every child of man, a certain law engraved, as the scripture testifies, whether the individual enjoys only the light of nature as it is called, or possesses the more distinct revelation of the inspired word. But those feeble natural rudiments, which suffice to indicate the path of duty, and those feelings of remorse which operate, it may be, as checks upon iniquity, are altogether insufficient to produce in the sinner’s mind, a proper sense of his natural depravity, or a due conviction of his alienation from the life of God through sin. The operation of the Law written in the heart, does indeed produce salutary effects. Were it not for the beneficial and powerful constraint of this internal guide and inward avenger, the condition of this present evil world would be far worse than it is now. But with this concession to the excellent use of

natural conscience and of the law it dictates, it still remains true, that by the power of this law the sinner is never really humbled before his God, and made to cry out in the bitterness of his soul, "Woe is me, I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." (Isa. vi. 5.) It is by the power of the law, in the hand of the Spirit, that the awakened sinner first beholds the thrice Holy Lord of Hosts. (ver. 3.) And upon this law, containing as it does the awful portraiture of a Holy God, who can be no other than a consuming fire to the sinner, the Holy Ghost compels him to fix his newly-opened eyes. And from whence this fearful knowledge of a sin-avenging God, except it is derived by a peculiar operation of the Spirit? We had the law before written in our hearts by nature, and we had the letter also of the revelation of the law in our possession. But we were not at that time dismayed as we are now. We had convictions of sin, but by means of repentance and amendment of life, they ceased to trouble us. Or we were condemned in our hearts, but stifled our remorse. Now it is far otherwise. Our convictions cannot be got rid of thus. They will not thus be quieted. Repentance will not soothe them; for we have discovered that amendment of life will not atone for past sins. Nor can we by any means stifle the conviction that God is angry with our sins, and that his wrath is revealed from heaven against our ungodliness and unrighteousness. Contemplate our case in any light we may, God appears to our awakened souls as the avenger of his broken statutes, and as the awful and just judge, "who will by no means clear the guilty." Our repentance and amendment of life may profit us as it regards the creature and the present life,

but how shall the sentence be repealed, "the soul that sinneth it shall die : "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them !" The experience of those who have received an unction from the Holy One, will confirm the truth of this delineation, and they will assent to the statement, that the knowledge of sin by the law, which is produced by the Spirit of God, is altogether a different thing from any ordinary illumination of the natural mind, however correct or distinct its previous knowledge may have been. And let it not be forgotten that the main difference consists in this, that if the Spirit be the teacher, every hope of justification by the works of the law is utterly annihilated ; the sinner pleads guilty to the equity of the sentence which condemns him, and confesses that the law which pronounces his doom, is "holy, and just, and good." If he venture to speak to God, it is not to attempt a palliation of his sin, but to deplore it ; not to extenuate the guilt of his offences, or to protest against the undue rigour of the sentence, but to supplicate for mercy, and to implore the repeal, if it be possible, of that decree which consigns the sinner to perdition.

In addition to this knowledge of sin by the Law, those who receive an unction from the Holy One, obtain also an acquaintance with that Gospel, which discloses to the sinner how God can be just and at the same time the justifier of the ungodly. (Rom. iii. 21, 26.) This second branch of knowledge is a very blessed supplement to the first, and the Holy Ghost makes it effectual to the saving illumination of the souls confided to his teaching by the Father and the Son. His agency also is as much needed now as before, for the convicted sinner can no more of himself, discern, and lay hold upon the free

grace of the Gospel, than he could at the first produce in himself the just terrors of the Law. A divine power is alike required in both cases. It is the Spirit who convinces of sin, it is the Spirit also, who convinces "of righteousness." (John xvi. 10.) It is he who instructs us in that "righteousness" of God which is now manifested without the Law, being witnessed by the Law and the prophets. (Rom. iii. 21, 22.) "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." The Holy Ghost, by the instrumentality of the revealed word, imparts to such as are the subjects of his saving operations, an insight into the tenor of the new covenant of grace, enabling the soul to discern its salvation, without works of righteousness, as distinctly as it perceives its destruction by works of sin, and its perfect recovery in Christ, as clearly as its lost state in Adam. And to convinced souls the Holy Ghost discloses also, by the teaching of the word, the Father's readiness to receive the returning prodigal. It is he who applies to the heart the knowledge, that "God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us," and that "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." True it is, these Scriptures were perhaps already most familiar to the convinced sinner's memory. It may be, he was well acquainted with them in the letter; but their Spirit could not take possession of his soul, till "the love of God" so powerfully attested in them, was "shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him." And as at the first, so afterwards, in every step of the life of faith, the returning sinner is enlightened by the Holy Ghost, and led on by new discoveries of divine

truth. The Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ, and shews them to the converted soul, who under this heavenly teaching, continually grows into the knowledge of its gracious and almighty Saviour. By degrees the believer is led into the whole truth as it is in Jesus, and more and more approaches the condition indicated by the apostle, when he addresses the disciples "as knowing all things."

But this comprehensive knowledge comprises within it new and clear views of the nature of this present evil world. "We know," says the apostle in a subsequent chapter, "that the whole world lieth in wickedness." Not only are we convinced of sin in our own hearts by the power of the law, but we perceive all men to be by nature in a like state of condemnation with ourselves. We see also that men's works are as wicked as their state is bad; nor can we be imposed upon as heretofore, by the specious righteousness of those who know not God. The tree we know to be corrupt, and that the fruit of such a tree is necessarily corrupt also. Nor is our knowledge confined to the persons of men, whom we discern to be universally dead in sin, (but for restoring grace). We are aware of the fact, that the earth itself is cursed for man's sake, and that all its creatures are made subject to vanity by reason of man's sin, so that his wickedness infects, as it were, the whole frame of nature, and pollutes every portion of the orb which he inhabits. Alas, how does this fearful knowledge force itself more and more upon the believer's mind! How does he grow into the conviction, that man's wickedness is great upon the earth; so great, that the doom of this fallen world would very speedily be executed, were it not for those purposes of mercy, which have yet to be accomplished.

It will not be necessary to enter into a detailed account of all the varied knowledge possessed by those who have an unction from the Holy One; but some important points remain for our consideration. And one of these is also suggested to us by our apostle, in connexion with his affirmation regarding the believer's knowledge of the whole world's captivity in sin. For with this declaration he unites another of a far different kind. He says, "And we know that we are of God." That is, "whilst men generally are fast tied, and bound with the chains imposed upon them by the God of this world, we know that we are ourselves delivered, in virtue of a spiritual birth from God;" or in other words, "whilst men generally are in a state of sin and death, such is not the condition of all, for some are rescued from this miserable state; also we know ourselves to be of the latter number; "we know that we are of God." Nor is John the only inspired teacher who supposes that believers possess this knowledge of their adoption into the family of God. Paul says, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." And a still greater authority, the Lord himself, directs his disciples to rejoice that their names are written in heaven: (Luke x. 12.) a command which none could obey, except they were persuaded that their names were indeed inscribed in the book of life. But the supposition of such a knowledge as this, is identified in many minds, with arrogance and enthusiasm. Some think it to be an evidence of overwhelming pride, that any should assert they are "of God," whilst they also affirm that the generality of men, are of the world which lieth in wickedness. 'From whence,' say they, 'is this superior sanctity of yours, which you boast of possessing, whilst the greater part of your fellow-creatures

are without it. You say that you are of God, but how do you make good your claim to this distinction? We too are of God, although we arrogate no peculiar honour to ourselves, believing that all men are by nature the objects of God's love.' The imputation also of an over-wrought and misguided enthusiasm, is cast upon those who imagine that believers may be assured of their own calling and election of God, and that such a knowledge is actually imparted to them by the spirit of truth. Some suppose, not only that no such knowledge is attainable, but that if it were, it would be prejudicial to the Christian, whose holiness is best secured, as they think, by his continually labouring to obtain the favour of God, as yet uncertain whether or not he possesses it. To imagine ourselves already enrolled amongst the favourites of heaven, before we have borne the full burthen and heat of the day, and when we have, it may be, laboured but for one hour, appears likely, as they fancy, to engender the pride which goes before destruction, and the haughty spirit which precedes a fall. On the other hand, a continual doubting, whether after all we may not be self-deceived, and a constant fear lest we should attach too much importance to our supposed experience of the Spirit's operations, they consider a salutary check upon enthusiastic or presumptuous feeling, and the safeguard of Christian lowliness. But rather let us fear, in spite of the alarms expressed by the advocates of an unmeaning and false caution, lest we offend, rather by a depreciation of the Spirit's work, than by an undue exaggeration of his illuminating power. The danger is far greater in this quarter than in the other, for we are much more disposed to limit the operations of the Holy Ghost, than to extend them unduly. There can be no doubt of this fact, although

at the same time we admit freely that some few may be deceived in regard to certain impressions and feelings, which they mistake for the presence and evidence of the Spirit in their hearts. But the believer's safeguard is ever this. He betakes himself to the word of God. He might be presumptuous, without the instructions of the Scripture; he might be vainly enthusiastic, but for its decisions. But these are his counsellors by day, and his meditation by night. How then should he err so grossly as it is supposed he may do? Does he follow the guidance of his own proud thoughts or vain imaginations? If he does, he may be deceived; but far from this, he knows that "he who trusts in his own heart is a fool, and he brings every thought of his mind, and every emotion of his heart, to the touchstone of God's word, that it may be tried thereby. And with such a lamp to guide him, and with such a lantern to direct him, why should he be supposed as liable to err, as those are, who have no such guidance from the Father of lights, and who possess no such wisdom from above? Far be it from us then, to place the children of the highest, who are seeking wisdom at his mouth, on a level with the vain herd who follow their own idle dreams, or the suggestions of the father of lies, and mistake them for the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. It is highly unreasonable, nay, worse, it is blasphemous so to do: but, alas, reason is not consulted in a matter where prejudice and enmity to the truth are so distinctly visible. The well-founded pretensions of the enlightened followers of Jesus are not allowed, and they are confounded with the dreams of visionaries, for this reason generally, that however scriptural the experiences of the saints may be, they are repugnant to the minds of those in whom no saving work of grace has

taken place. And how should it be otherwise? how shall the wicked cease to "speak evil of the things that they understand not?" (2 Peter ii. 12.) This vice is one of the characteristics of those who know not God; no wonder then that it should prevail and abound as it too clearly does.

It cannot then by any sophistry be disproved, that those are safe who rely in singleness of heart upon the testimony of the Scripture, in regard to their condition in God's sight. At the same time it cannot reasonably be denied, but that the Holy Ghost may also impart to the believer a knowledge of his individual acceptance in a way of immediate testimony; nor can the believer's assurance that he is the subject of such immediate testimony be disproved, provided he is able to show that it is in no respect falsified by an appeal "to the word and to the testimony." Should any man indeed affirm that a sort of knowledge of which we find no mention in Scripture, has been communicated to him by the Spirit, we may properly doubt of the fact, but when the supposed communication is exactly in accordance with the experience of the saints, as that experience is depicted to us in the Scripture, no reasonable ground of doubt remains. To the word of God, therefore, we refer continually, that by it we may ascertain the genuine nature of our spiritual teaching; not that we by any means make the direct testimony of the Spirit to the heart, inferior to the testimony of the written word, for in so doing, we should account the immediate voice of the creator to be less distinct than that of his creature, the word; but because the Lord, in pity to our weakness, and in the consideration of our being encompassed about with lying spirits, has afforded us this twofold evidence that it is his own voice we hear.

We pass on to the consideration of another branch of the knowledge possessed by those who have an unction from the Holy One. And already we have seen them enlightened in the knowledge of sin by the law, and in the knowledge of righteousness by the gospel; and possessing also the knowledge of that judgment which is passed upon this present evil world, and of the blessed truth that a people is preserved in the midst of the overthrow, amongst whom, by grace, they are numbered. Now to this varied knowledge, all of which is preparing its recipients for the life to come, there is added suitable instruction for the right conduct of these persons in their present life on earth. They know what duties to their neighbour it becomes them to practice, and what are the virtues which makes men serviceable to their fellow men. The Holy Ghost has taught them a new code of morals, and now they know that they should love their neighbour as themselves, and their brethren in the faith fervently, out of a pure heart. Not that the duties of the second table were hidden from them before. They were acquainted with them in the letter, but now they know them by the teaching of the Spirit. By means of the unction they have received, the law of love is revealed to them in its divine enactments, and written on the fleshly tables of their hearts. And what an incomparable knowledge is this! how sublime is its light! Truly it was derived from heaven, for man knows not by nature, save to love himself, and to hate his kind. (Titus iii. 3.) Witness his remorseless and cruel oppression of his species, and his shameless disregard of the happiness of his fellow men. Witness the blood profusely shed through many a clime and year, and the groans of the miserable slaves who are constrained to minister to their foul tyrants! How

is it that such wickedness has ever abounded and still abounds? Only for this reason, that sinful men know not that they should love their neighbours as themselves. They are destitute of any such knowledge. They have indeed the letter of the precept, but no unction from the "Holy One," by which they embrace and make this precious truth their own. This knowledge God's saints alone possess.

An objection may be stated to our restriction of true benevolence to the servants of Christ; for it may be urged, that very many who give no evidence of saving grace, give proof of a lively sense of duty to their fellow men; advocating their rights as human beings, and endeavouring in all ways to procure a mitigation of their temporal sufferings. But it may be replied to this, that such philanthropists as those adverted to, are for the most part extremely partial in their benevolence. They will at one time plead for their fellow men, and at another time oppress them. It is to be feared that there is but little soundness in their love, and that their knowledge of duty is most imperfect. At the same time we are bound to acknowledge the great goodness of God in the partial illumination of some of those who know him not in truth. He works by these men in the promotion of his schemes of mercy. He actuates their hearts, infusing into them goodwill to his unhappy creatures. And it becomes us also to hold such in honour for their works' sake, praying also that the Lord will make them the objects of his favour, and that he will care for those who appear in any degree to care for others.

We have supposed that every individual Christian, by the testimony of our Apostle, is in the possession of all saving truth; but still a question arises in connexion with our present subject, as to the extent of the divine

knowledge, vouchsafed to every individual member of Christ's mystical body; for it is a matter of fact that some believers are more perfectly enlightened than others, and the Scriptures also assert that this is the case.

Are we then to suppose that every individual believer, considered separately and apart from others, is in possession of all truth, or that the apostle intends rather to address the church collectively when he says, "Ye know all things?"

There is no real difficulty in the case before us, as it is evident that the apostle John could not ascribe to any individual a degree of knowledge which they did not possess, and it is to be presumed that the believers he addressed were like believers in our own and other times, only partially enlightened. By declaring then that they know "all things," he does not imply that their knowledge was without blemish, or incapable of increase, but he only means that generally, as members of Christ's body, they were in the possession of those treasures of wisdom and knowledge which are hidden in Christ for the benefit of his people. It is certainly the case, that some believers are very ignorant in comparison of others, and yet it may be affirmed with truth that it is the prerogative of believers, as such, to know all things, and that if they are at anytime addressed collectively and as a body, it is certain that they do so. For the deficiency that may exist in any one member, is supposed to be supplied by the sufficiency that exists in another member, so that what could not be correctly affirmed of a single individual, if he were considered as detached from his fellow members, may be properly affirmed of him in his connexion with the whole body. (1 Cor. xii. 4—31, and Eph. iv. 16.) But true as this

is, it is probable that our Apostle's assertion is not limited to this view of the matter, but that he appeals to the individual experience of those he addressed, as much as to the fact that the all comprehensive knowledge of divine truth resides in the church of God, in virtue of that heavenly unction which, being first poured forth upon Christ the head, descends to the uttermost skirts of his raiment. (Psalm cxxxiii. 1—3.)

Another question may be urged in regard to the all comprehensive knowledge which we have supposed, on the authority of Scripture, to be vested in the church. For it may be said, 'If this knowledge exists, how is it that such feeble marks of it appear; for so transcendent a light ought surely to emit rays of more power and beauty than any we behold?' But to this we reply, without fear of contradiction, that if the light of knowledge possessed by the church appears feeble in comparison of what we can imagine it might be, it is vast and bright indeed, compared with all the illumination which has ever been derived from the unassisted reason and wisdom of man. Surely of all heathen nations we may fairly say, not excepting the most polished nations of antiquity, "the light that was in them was but darkness." (Matt. vi. 22, 23.) And if in these intellectual days, and in these periods of diffused knowledge, we calculate the real extent of the light possessed by the children of disobedience, is it not still as "darkness visible," compared with the true light which shines within the church of God? Nor does it admit of dispute, that every wise and beneficent scheme, devised in the later ages of the world for the improvement of human happiness, has emanated from the oracles of God. The very infidel philanthropists themselves, unconsciously derive their light from the bright sun, which in their ignorance they

despise, and would extinguish if they could. For how is it that our modern philosophers are of a different order from the sages of past times? True, they are not sound at heart, and many of their schemes are fraught with folly and with mischief, but still, affecting benevolence as they do, and some of them actually alive to something of this principle, from whence did they derive it? From whence but from the silent, all-powerful influence of that light which encircles them on every side, and which shines into their minds and hearts whether they will or no. No thanks to them, that they are in some respects wiser and more beneficent than their predecessors in the school of merely human wisdom. The light of knowledge which emanates from the church, constrain them to see objects which were hidden from the generations that preceded them. Before they can distinguish their right hand from their left, the genial influence of Christianity has embued their minds, and softened their otherwise hard hearts. They grow up under this benign and gracious light. It pervades their thoughts, their words, their actions. In vain do they madly talk of the possibility of dispensing with that knowledge in which they live, and move, and have their being. Engrafted into the church, (although but outwardly and nominally) they are partakers of her blessed light, and cannot, if they would, walk entirely in darkness. Truly the light of knowledge is prodigious and eminently bright, which has emanated from that despised people of whom the Lord has said, "Ye are the light of the world." And can we not safely say in regard to that light of knowledge, spiritual and moral, which has been already partially diffused through the world by the church of Christ, that "the light of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more

unto the perfect day ? ” Surely we may say this ; for every increasing mitigation of evil enjoyed by our fallen race, every progressive developement of just and gracious principles, may be traced to the increasingly clear and diffused light of those divine oracles, of which the church is the depository and the promulgator. Most unjustly then and unreasonably, shall we deny the vast extent of knowledge which the world has already derived from that source of light, concerning which some of us are ready to exclaim, unwisely enough, How feeble as it regards this life have been its rays, and how weak its power !

In the remarks that have just been made, an eye has been had principally to that branch of divine knowledge which has respect to the present amelioration of man's condition on the earth. “ The godliness which has the promise of the life that now is,” rather than that of the life to come, has been contemplated. And this has been selected rather than the other, because although such of us as have the spirit of Christ are free to acknowledge the efficacy of the light of faith as the only medium of salvation, we do not always perceive so readily and distinctly, that we are indebted to the same light, for all things that are honest, just, and pure ; for all that is lovely and of good report ; for all the virtue and the praise that commends itself to our esteem and approbation even in the natural mind, and amongst the very reprobate themselves. (Phil. iv. 8, 9.) Nor is it a just cause of offence that the Church, possessed, as we have supposed her to be, with the knowledge of all truth, has not been able to effect more than we see accomplished. “ She has done what she could : ” this verdict must be awarded her. And if she has done no more, let us weigh against this ap-

parent deficiency, the stout opposition of the carnal mind ever directed to oppose her aims, and the implacable war, waged against her principles by the powers and principalities of earth and hell. Most surely, "she has done what she could." No inclination to hide her light can be charged upon her. It has shone in persecution and in death. And ever and anon she has again trimmed her lamp, and quickened the flame, which was given her for the cheering of the nations, the friendly light, which the children of this world desire to quench. That they have not quenched it, is to be ascribed to the Lord's grace, and to his purpose of mercy which cannot be annulled. That the wicked have caused it to burn less brightly than the Church desired, must be imputed to the same will of God, and to that righteous judgment of God which oftentimes punishes the wicked, by allowing them to put out the light, which would have guided their feet into the way of peace. Then if asked, 'How is it that the Church of Christ has as yet effected no more, possessed, as you suppose her to be, of an unction from the Holy One, by which she knows all things, and influenced moreover by a divine power accompanying that light of truth?' We reply, The word of the Lord always accomplishes that which God pleases, and the thing whereunto it is sent. (Isa. lv. 11.) It is his will that the knowledge he has committed to his people should contend with the ignorance of the world. He appoints this trial for his people's faith; and he will have the light shine in the midst of surrounding and remaining darkness, that the praise of its beauty and its glory, may be ascribed unto himself alone. In this way it appears clearly, that the Church obtains her superior knowledge from God only. From

whence but from him, her light which the wicked seek to quench? Is it self-derived, or such as natural persons may obtain by their own industry? Impossible. For else, why do a few only possess this light, and why are those hated upon the earth, who labour to diffuse it? But we are slow to acknowledge this truth; even such of us as possess a measure of God's grace, are reluctant to acknowledge fully and freely, that grace alone makes any to differ from their fellow-men, and that God is a mighty sovereign, who will not give us a full account of his matters. He will therefore confound our pride of heart, reverse our thoughts, work when and how it pleases him, and in ways most unfitting, as it seems to us. He will give his Church a light suited to enlighten the world. He will inspire it with knowledge calculated to make all men happy. He will infuse into the hearts of his saints a desire to communicate to others their great gifts; (which indeed he commands them to do): and at the same time he will suffer them to be derided by the wicked, their work to be opposed, and their light, it may be, to be put out in darkness. But shall we say therefore that their light, even as it regards the wicked, has shone in vain? God forbid! Or that a more rapid increase of the visible power of the Church is at all events to be desired? Not so. In every case, and in all cases, the Lord is to be glorified. He is to be adored in all his ways, and his inscrutable providence to be admired, as certainly illustrating his own perfections. And it may be that if we thus humble ourselves beneath the mighty hand of God, he will exalt us in due time, by shewing us, even on this earth, that "he doeth all things well." It may be, that he will say to us, even here, "Come up higher." "Shall I conceal from Abraham's seed,

that thing which I do?" "Enter into my counsel, Oh my people, and know that all things proceed according to the purpose of my will, which is dark indeed and inscrutable to man's sense and reason, but just and good, if disclosed and assented to, by the light of my sanctuary. By faith enter therein, and believe that I am the only wise God; also, that what thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter."

"I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth." A slight paraphrase of this verse has already been attempted in connexion with the preceding verse, but it will be considered separately, as affording subject matter for distinct remarks. And this declaration of our apostle's, to the persons he addressed, evidently points out an important fact in connexion with the ministry of the word, which we shall do well to observe. And it is this: That the reasons which induce the faithful stewards of the grace of God, to address different classes of hearers, is two-fold. They address some, because they are as yet ignorant of the truth, and as the ambassadors of God they beseech such—"Be ye reconciled to God." But their ministry is proposed to others for a far different reason: even because they already know God, and are already become partakers of his reconciling grace. And to such, the address is not, "be ye reconciled," but, 'being reconciled, know the fulness of that reconciliation, and the length, and breadth, and heights, and depths of that love of God which is manifested to you, in the gift of his eternal Son.'

It is too common an error amongst the partially-instructed ministers of the word, to suppose that unconverted hearers, or those who are just commencing their

Christian career, demand their unremitting attention, whilst the souls of more experienced believers may with propriety be left unsustained by the sincere milk of the word. And it is too true, however uncharitable the assumption may appear, that this propensity on the part of ministers to dispense the word of life to the least advanced portions of their hearers, arises mainly from the melancholy circumstance, that their own minds are but partially imbued with that truth, to which it may be, many in their congregations have attained. Such teachers therefore, it is to be feared, under the specious and pleasing idea of performing duties to one or two classes of hearers, are led to overlook their own protracted state of infancy in divine knowledge; and under this veil of comparative and superior usefulness, they conceal from themselves, and it may be in a measure from others also, that they are content to remain always in the condition of novices, producing from their treasury, things, not "new and old," but old merely; things which though true, are out of season, because "for the time," they should be found teachers dispensing far other truths. (Heb. v. 11, &c.; and vi. 1—3.) But in vain shall deficient ministers plead as an excuse, that they comply at least with the injunction to "preach the gospel to every creature," and to feed the lambs of Christ's fold. Should they even do this, which is a fact greatly to be questioned,—for the circumstance of their continually overlooking *the sheep* of Christ's fold, leads one to suspect their capability for performing any one of the duties of a shepherd,—even then, how can they escape from the condemnation of the non-fulfilment of the other equally binding and reiterated command, "Feed my sheep?" (John xxi. 16, 17.)

It is obvious that the above remarks do not apply to those gospel ministries, which are carried on by the youthful ministers of the word, who cannot reasonably be expected to attain at once to that advanced knowledge which is the ordinary growth of years. Far from this, the writer would hail every faithful exposition of divine truth, however elementary, and account it most important and valuable, provided that such teaching is the offspring of a mind so taught of God as to be sedulously following on to know him better, in order that increased personal knowledge may issue in increased capabilities of usefulness. But it is sad, when so far from this being the case, the growing believer's instructed ear and heart, can discover no corresponding growth of knowledge expressed in the ministry of the word, but finds the same elementary truths which were, it may be, his proper food some ten or twenty years ago, still presented to him as the only nourishment of his maturer life. It may however, be objected, that the gifts of God being various, and the Spirit dividing to each minister severally as he will, he may see it good to afford to one, the power of forcibly convincing the unenlightened conscience, and to another the ability to edify believers in their most holy faith, so that in this way, some shall be always no more than teachers of babes, whilst others occupy the office of more advanced instructors. But supposing it to be a fact, that God will sometimes have his gifts to be thus distributed, so that a peculiar power of instruction in some one branch of knowledge shall attend a particular individual, it does not follow, that the far greater part of ministers may safely infer, that the Lord has in their case seen it good to restrict his gifts to a capability of elementary teaching. Such a supposition would tend greatly to check

the growth of the spiritual mind, to retard the due development of its powers, and to cramp the energies which perchance it might display under a more fostering influence. It is not necessary however, to have recourse to any such supposition as the one suggested in regard to the distribution of ministerial gifts, for the cases seldom or never occur, in which ministers plead their consciousness of such a divine limitation in their particular case, as a reason for their deficiencies. On the contrary, we may perceive, that the least efficient, and most universally defective teachers, plead the advantage of large classes of their hearers, rather than any restricted powers of their own, as a reason for their confining their instructions to the first principles of the doctrine of Christ. Far from imagining themselves incompetent to feed the sheep, such persons often declare that they would do so, did not other duties of greater urgency claim a first attention. Indeed they would not have it supposed that they could not, if they would, bring forth out of their treasury things "new and old," but rather, that it is against their notion of general utility so to do. It is not for want of power then, but of will, that believers remain in so many cases unfed. No scanty supply of knowledge or of gifts on the minister's part, causes the deficiency, but rather this very deficiency is the result, it would seem, of the exercise of his sound judgment. But meanwhile the ill-tended sheep are incredulous as to any such fact as this, and cannot be persuaded of its truth. They are conscious that they need the Shepherd's voice to direct and animate, and console them on their way? And moreover, many passages meet their eye in the word of God, expressive of his will in regard to the nurture of their souls, and many promises attract their notice, in which

the Lord avows his purpose of giving his people pastors after his own heart, who shall fill them with knowledge and understanding, (Jer. iii. 15.) Many denunciations also meet their view, awfully expressive of the effects of ignorance in the people of the Lord—"My people (says Jehovah) perish for lack of knowledge;" (Hos. iv. 6.) and from whence this lack? The priests do not supply knowledge to this people as they ought. (Mal. ii. 7—9.) There is the main cause of their souls' need. Not that the elect of God actually perish, through the unfaithfulness or imbecility of their proper instructors. We are well-assured this cannot be, and that when our God uses the language of the text, he only does it, to mark expressively the vast importance of the knowledge of himself, and the fearful responsibility of those who keep back this knowledge from his people. For God will supply "all his people's need according to the riches of his grace in Christ Jesus." He has given us a promise to that effect, and his hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear, when his people plead with him for the fulfilment of his own word. Still the Lord's superabounding grace, and his faithful prosecution of his own scheme of mercy in the care of his elect, does not by any means exonerate from blame those ministers of his word, who neglect the due nurture of the souls of his people, whatever may be the pretence by which they reconcile to themselves the omission of the work. If the appointed ministers do not feed the sheep, God will yet have them fed, and he will himself supply secondary channels of instruction, if the primary ones fail. If the voice of living men be mute, God will cause the dead to speak. But shall the living be excused on that account? By no means. Nevertheless through their deficiency of

faithful zeal in the prosecution of their ministerial office, God will magnify his own grace, and his tender care of his people ; also by means of the default of some, he will greatly increase the reward of other of his servants. For if through the deficiency of those living men who ought to be the helpers of his people, the Lord gives to his elect consolation and instruction in righteousness, by the faithful writings of witnesses for the truth, long dead, shall not a brighter crown of glory be awarded to those zealous servants of their God, who in this way confirm many in righteousness, not only in their own age, but in the ages succeeding their own ; “ who being dead, yet speak for the edification of the church ; ” and to whom are begotten from day to day, sons and daughters, by the mighty operation of the Spirit of the Lord, in connexion with the utterance of their laborious and faithful pens ? It is a remarkable fact, and well attested in the experience of the church at this time, that believers can often trace up their most important spiritual instruction to the agency of books, rather than to the *vivâ voce* teaching of their spiritual guides. When any new and increasing light dawns on the believer’s mind, from whence does he derive it ? If we ask him, he will generally say, from such or such a writer, blessed to me by the Lord at such a time. If the foundations of faith are clearly revealed to the well-instructed soul, from whence does he for the most part obtain his peculiar knowledge ? Not from those teachers who touch upon no such matters, and who know not that it is expedient for believers to be acquainted with the nature of their standing in Christ, and to be instructed in the eternal love of the Father, but rather from a perusal of one or other of those faithful friendly guides, who delight in exhibiting to Zion’s pilgrims the

strong bulwarks of their city, and the fair palaces which rise up within her walls. (Ps. xlviii. 12, 13.) Woe be to the Church if she depended solely upon the scanty supplies of doctrinal truth afforded her in the weekly ministrations of her professed teachers !

But ought it so to be ? or can any satisfactory reason be assigned for the melancholy truth, that the ministers of the word do not keep ahead of their people in divine knowledge, as they ought most assuredly to do. It would be absurd to argue that the Lord will display the sovereignty of his grace in this as in other ways, by causing those who should occupy the place of learners, to equal or perhaps surpass their teachers in divine knowledge. As a general rule, ‘ God is the God of order and not of confusion ; ’ and if he appears sometimes to confound the right order instituted by himself, this is not that he may capriciously display his sovereignty, but rather in judgment, and because men have carelessly neglected to fulfil the salutary order which their God has prescribed. It behoves the ministers of God to be very studious of his word, and to give themselves laboriously to the meditation of the truths of Scripture. They should be sedulously devoted to the word of God, and to prayer. Patient study should occupy their time. (1 Tim. iv. 15.) They should be men of research, of investigation ; not satisfied with present attainments, but ever increasing their store of divine knowledge, in order that they may be able always to retain a position so much in advance of their people, as to fit them for carrying on the work of faith in the minds of their most rapidly advancing hearers. But if ministers fail to comply zealously and systematically with the prescribed means of acquiring knowledge ; and if they relax in that diligence, which should be con-

tinually increased rather than diminished, how shall their profiting appear unto all? (Tim. iv. 15.) How shall it be manifested to all, that they are advancing in the knowledge of God, whilst in fact they are stationary in the vast field of truth? Some it may be will not detect their incompetency. Some it may be will not perceive that their teachers have not profited at all, during the last ten or twenty, or even thirty years. They may be well satisfied with the sort of elementary truth which is given them month after month, and year after year. They are not conscious of any deficiency, for they feel no need of any stronger meat. But why is this, except that the sluggishness of the teachers has been communicated to the minds of the hearers, and has operated so unfavourably in their case, as to make them satisfied that are already in possession of as much truth, as it is necessary or desirable they should possess. Indeed such hearers know not that any can be more gifted with knowledge than they are themselves; and should such a thing be hinted to them, it is received with all the self-complacent security of those who know not that they are "poor and miserable and blind and naked." A suspicion has also crept into their minds, that a state of childhood in divine knowledge is a safe state, and rather to be desired than enlarged attainments, which might only induce pride of heart. And it is lamentable to think that this common error is too often cherished in the minds of the people by the pastors themselves, who find it convenient to assume, that a deficiency in knowledge is on the whole friendly to growth and stability *in grace*. Our teacher Paul is however of a different mind; he says distinctly, "in understanding be men;" and Peter connects growth in grace with growth of knowledge; (2 Pet. iii. 18.) also Paul

severely reprove all those persons, who forbear to press onward to perfection in the doctrine of Christ, (Heb. v. 11—14.) and who, through their own fault, are become incapable of receiving aught of truth, save its elementary principles. (ver. 12.) The admonition of our inspired teacher, is addressed indifferently to all believers. None are excluded. His reproof meets all, who are not following on to know the whole counsel of God. But if all believers are addressed indiscriminately, without reference to sex, or station in the church, can ministers by any possibility be excluded? rather must not all that the apostle says, refer to them with a greater potency, than to any other; for if all are expected to be so enlightened, what should the illumination of teachers be?

It may be pleaded in behalf of the deficiency which is the subject of the present complaint, that the unfortunate system of overworking the ministers of religion, is one main cause of their low state of knowledge; because the time which should be devoted to study is now occupied in other matters, which do not at all promote the culture of the spiritual mind, but have too probably, rather an opposite tendency. Nor can it be denied that there is much truth in this plea, and that many a minister of the church would serve her better than he does, were he not oppressed with multitudinous cares, which exhaust his energies, and occupy the time which might be more fitly devoted to other objects. It is to be feared, however, that while a few are aware of the deficiencies of their own knowledge, and lament that overpowering burthen of engagements, which is often so hostile to the proper development of the spiritual understanding; too many are indifferent on this important subject, alike ignorant of their own deficien-

cies and of the responsibility resting upon the ministers of the word, in connexion with their duty of guiding the flock into all truth. It is indeed the Holy Ghost who is promised as the primary agent in this work. (John xvi. 13, 14.) But the ministers of the gospel are fellow-workers together with God, (2 Cor. vi. 1.) consequently their services cannot be dispensed with, as the Lord himself requires them. God gives the increase, but " Paul must plant and Apollos must water ;" and happy are those faithful men, who, knowing themselves to be the appointed overseers of the flock, account it their high and honourable office to guide into all truth the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood. Happy, thrice happy that Christian teacher, of whom it can be said, " He helped them much which had believed through grace." (Acts xviii. 27.)

Should any be disposed to question the superior worth of those ministers, who competently address the ransomed of the Lord, such persons will do well to consider the import of that remarkable testimony of Christ concerning John the Baptist, in Matt. xi. 11. " Verily, verily, I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." For these words import that the office of the Christian ministry is glorious, in proportion to the measure of truth which it reveals. John testifies of " Jesus as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," and he directed his hearers to Him who could baptize them with the Holy Ghost. (John i. 29—37.) Of John it is said by his father Zacharias in Luke i. 76, 77, that he should go " before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the

remission of their sins," and this knowledge he dispensed to Israel, as we have already seen in the verses before quoted, when he called upon the church to behold the Son of God, making in his own person an atonement for man's sin, and himself carrying away that sin, as the fulfiller of those legal types with which the Jewish people were well acquainted. It would seem then that John was most emphatically, a preacher of the gospel; for what else could he be? He testified of Jesus and of remission of sins through him. He directed his hearers to Christ, and affirmed that he would impart to them the gift of the Holy Ghost, (Matt. iii. 11.) Those persons then are mistaken, who account John to have been no more than a preacher of the doctrine of repentance; for his ministry was no other than the gospel ministry of reconciliation. He did not indeed proclaim any glad tidings of salvation to those pharisees and hypocrites to whom he refused baptism; but rather preached to them the vindictive terrors of that righteous law which they pretended to keep. With a stern contempt, he commanded such to bring forth those good fruits, which, according to their own estimate of themselves, they had full power to produce. To the pharisees, confident in their own righteousness, and feeling no need of an atoning sacrifice for sin, he enjoined immediately the performance of good works, that their hypocrisy might in this way be detected; for they were of the number of those who said, but did not. And in this method of preaching, John exemplified the counsel of that God, "who with the froward will show himself froward." (Psalm xviii. 26.) But on the other hand, to the common mass, he proclaimed the Saviour. To those who did not affect to be better in God's sight than other men, he told of one who should expiate their

guilt; of one, in whose power to save they might securely trust, as he was the Son of God to whom the Spirit was not given by measure. (John iii. 34.) Surely John should be accounted a gospel preacher, for how few of our evangelical teachers get beyond his ministry! For proof of which, let the Baptist's doctrine be examined, and compared with what is ordinarily heard from the pulpits of our churches. Let the import of all the truth spoken by John be well considered, and it will be evident, that few of our instructors give us more than the substance of his initiatory teaching. But ought these things so to be? If John's ministry have less of truth attaching to it, than belongs to the least perfect and least efficient ministry of those teachers to whom a higher dispensation of the gospel is committed, in what class of ministers shall we place our present ordinary teachers? According to the time, to use St. Paul's emphatic words in addition to those expressive ones of John himself, which have been already quoted, they should be now "in the kingdom of heaven." John appears to have been on the borders, as it were, of that kingdom, which had indeed come, even in his time, but not in the sense in which it has come to us; for we have received the kingdom, are set down in its heavenly places, and as Abraham's seed, should be walking forth into all its length and breadth. (Heb. xii. 28. Col. i. 12, 13. Eph. ii. 6. Gen. xiv. 14—17.)

But are we led into the full knowledge of this our happy state of privilege by our spiritual guides; or do they only point out this kingdom to us, and direct us to its king, going along with us it may be, to the borders of this realm of grace, and there leaving us? It cannot be denied that very few take us beyond the precincts of the heavenly Canaan; that very few introduce us into the

strong-holds of the imperial city. For say, ye pilgrims, into which of the mansions in your father's house, have ye yet been led, by the anxious faithful hand of those who watch to give account of your souls? Say, are ye each one of you, going on "from strength to strength," from one fortress of your faith to another fortress, equally impregnable? Which of the bulwarks of our Zion, led on by your spiritual guides, have ye as yet explored? And its foundations, "in which are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and which are garnished with all manner of precious stones," say, are these all exhibited to you, as they ought to be, in their rich and varied beauty? It is to be greatly feared, that for the most part they are not, and that ye have seldom the joy of being thus addressed; "Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." The ministry of the Baptist, is the sort of ministry to which ye are most accustomed. The truths ye hear are for the most part equivalent to those he uttered. Beyond his teaching your guides have not yet attained. Alas! may it not be feared that John's ministry surpasses theirs? for were they like him, friends of the bridegroom, "rejoicing greatly because of the bridegroom's voice," (John iii. 29.) did they like him internally sympathize in the love which Christ bears his bride, they could not be so indifferent to her joy as they too often are. Surely in such a case the Lord's betrothed people would occupy a place nearer their hearts, and they would labour diligently to promote the full joy of God's elect. Instead of concealing from them, or forbearing to discourse to them, of truths which should be known to them, although unknown to John; they would emulate the Baptist's love, and blest in the Lord's providence with a higher light than his, would aspire to use it for

the more perfect illumination of the saints. When they do not this, it is a foul blot upon what ought to be the fair escutcheon of their ministry. But of this blot, some even now are free. A few are found who are not only amongst the least in the kingdom of heaven, and so, great in comparison of all elementary teachers such as John, but even great, in a comparison with those dignitaries of the kingdom to whom its highest mysteries are revealed.

22. *Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.*

The apostle had observed in the preceding verse, that “no lie is of the truth,” and now he leads us, at once to that corrupt fountain from whence proceeds all varieties of false doctrine; intimating that a denial of the nature and office of that Jesus, who is both Son of God and Son of man, is the great antichristian heresy upon the front of which falsehood is signally stamped: and for this reason; because such a denial of the incarnate Saviour is also an attack upon *the Father*, who is vilified if Jesus be despised, and whose Godhead is trampled under foot, if Christ be not duly honoured. It appears with some professing Christians to be a comparatively light matter, whether the glorious person and offices of the Son of God be fully recognized;—whether Christ be degraded to the rank of a mere creature; or whether, being acknowledged to be God, he is nevertheless put on a footing with his creatures, and associated with a host of other mediators. The first error is that of the Socinians. The last-men-

tioned one, that of the papists; and if compelled to choose between two forms of direct hostility to Christ, the latter one may be justly branded as the most offensive of the two. For the preference that some well-meaning persons entertain for the popish creed, above the Socinian, is without foundation, if it be grounded (as we generally find it to be,) in the idea, that Jesus is at least honoured as God by the Romish Church. The Socinian teacher declares openly that he does not discover in the Scriptures any satisfactory recognition of the divinity of Jesus: consequently he impugnes all the doctrines which are connected with that fundamental truth. On the contrary, the false teacher of the apostate Church of Rome, professes to honour Christ as God, but immediately degrades him from his throne, and erects idols in his stead. Both parties deny equally all vital and collateral truths. The doctrine of justification by faith in the blood and righteousness of Christ, is as abhorrent to the Papist as to the Socinian. The difference then is merely this; that the Socinian flatly denies the doctrine of the atonement, whilst the papist professes to believe in it, but at the same time invents for himself innumerable modes of expiation upon which he reposes his deluded soul. Both parties hold the doctrine of works in opposition to the scriptural doctrine of faith without works: but the Socinian has somewhat the advantage here, for he at least inculcates the importance of some sort of civil righteousness, whereas the papist is taught that he can dispense even with this, provided he makes up the deficiency with monkish confessions, self-imposed penances, and self-devised duties. It is not the writer's intention to plead the cause of Socinianism, for that form of error must necessarily be most abhorrent to those

who have renounced all idea of human dignity and worth, and who, conscious of their misery, seek their refuge only in Christ, "whom not having seen they love, and in whom, believing, they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." And the contents of these pages bear witness to the continual utterance of sentiments, altogether inadmissible on the Socinian scheme, and in every way in direct opposition to its meagre acknowledgments of Scripture, and fearful denial of its vital truths. But still the writer must bear a yet stronger witness against that false Church which is the Mother of harlots and abominations of the earth; and for the reason before assigned; viz., because she is supposed by the very same persons, who stoutly oppose Socinianism, *to be right in the main*, and only to err, by heaping up errors *on the foundations of truth*. Now our position is this; that she has *no foundation, having destroyed the only one that can be laid,—Christ Jesus*. Apostate Rome has long ago "trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant wherewith she was sanctified an unholy thing, and has done despite unto the Spirit of grace." (Heb. x. 29.) She has sinned wilfully after having received the knowledge of the truth, "and now there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a fearful looking-for of judgment and of fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." (Heb. x. 26, 27.) And should any ask, how is this? How does Rome transgress after this manner, seeing that she as fully recognizes the doctrine of the Trinity, as do any of the most orthodox Protestant churches?—the reply is obvious. That Church is fundamentally heretical which denies that fallen man is saved by faith in the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Church of Rome affirms that the blood of

Christ does not of itself alone, cleanse from all sin. He who was a liar and murderer from the beginning, suggests through the teachers of that Church, that Jesus may do somewhat in the work of man's salvation, but that man must himself do more. That the blood of Christ may indeed atone in a degree, but that the wrath of God must also be expiated by penance, by confessions, and by works of various kinds. Now those persons who think lightly of papistical errors, should weigh well the denunciations levelled in scripture against all who exalt the creature in the Saviour's place; for this it must be believed is the damning sin for which no atonement is provided. (Heb. x. 26.) This is the sin for which, if persisted in, there is remission neither in this world; nor in the world to come. This is the true sin against the Holy Ghost, whose office it is to take of the things of Christ and to shew them unto us. And no doubt the apostate rejection of the blood that alone sanctifies, is connected by the apostle Paul with despite done to the Spirit of grace, to signify, that the fatal sin of blasphemy against the third person of the Trinity, is then committed, when the witness of the Spirit respecting Jesus is despised, and that blood of the covenant concerning which the Holy Ghost so abundantly testifies, is counted "an unholy thing;" that is, a thing not more holy than man's polluted works. Nor let it be thought that the application of the adduced texts of scripture is irrelevant to our present subject. True it is, that the apostle in writing to the Hebrews reprov'd primarily those Jewish converts who after a time forsook Christ for the sacrifices of the law; and who, not satisfied with that blood of the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, would still have recourse to the blood of bulls and of goats, with wilful perverse-

ness preferring the shadows of the Law to the substance of the Gospel. But with this admission, can it be denied, that Paul's denunciations apply with equal force to that apostate church, which, for the cure of its sin, relinquishes faith in the atonement of Jesus, and adopts in its stead confidence in human absolution, and in the works and ceremonies enjoined by men? The Jewish Christian might at least plead for his excuse, that God had himself commanded the sacrifices of the Law; but what Romanist can plead that his rites and maxims are of God? The ceremonial law of Moses was truly of God, and all the details of its ritual are authenticated by the indubitable text of scripture. But do we find any indication in the word of God, that the Romish traditions are derived from thence? Even this poor refuge then, in which the Jewish Christian might attempt to hide his disobedience and contempt of the gospel of God's grace, is not available to the apostate believer under the dispensation of the New Testament. He has now no cloak for his sin; it is open and plainly manifest to all whose eyes are not closed in judicial blindness. And what becomes then of the supposed radical soundness of the Romish Church, which some well-meaning persons ignorantly talk about, "knowing neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm." Upon her many heads we see inscribed, the name of Blasphemy. (Rev. xiii. 12.) And we find Satan giving her "a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies." (Rev. xiii. 5.) And we have heard her for many a day and year, and still hear her open her mouth "in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name." (Rev. xiii. 6.) She depreciates the worth of that blood, which is emphatically called in Scripture, "the blood of God." For she counts it as an unholy thing, or not sufficiently

pure to cleanse the sinner's soul, except he also purge away his own offences by works which she prescribes. And she rejects the intercession of the "one Mediator between God and man, "the man Christ Jesus," directing her miserable votaries to betake themselves to saints and angels for assistance. Not content with despising the all-sufficient efficacy of the blood of sprinkling, the apostate Christian church contemns the all-powerful advocacy of the Son at the right hand of the Father. And so his whole priesthood is dishonoured and despised ; and with his priesthood, his Godhead, for they stand or fall together. To separate them is impossible ; for it is the Godhead which gives its infinite value to the priesthood ; and if the priesthood of Christ be rejected, his Godhead is effectually denied. This is not all ; our teacher John affirms that another consequence arises out of this antichristian denial of the great author and finisher of our faith. Antichrist denies both the Father and the Son. The individual who contemns Christ despises the Father, and rejects his supreme authority. The Father is eternally identified with the Son, and the Son is identified with the man Christ Jesus. Refuse to honour this man aright, and you refuse to yield due worship to the Father. God has said to his believing people, "whoso toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye." And if such be his keen sense of any injury attempted against his saints, what must be its acuteness, when that beloved Son is attacked, in whom he is well pleased, and in whom his soul delights !

Whatever then is the form of antichristian hostility to Christ, whether the sacred dignity of his person, and divine efficacy of his offices be flatly denied, as is the case with the Socinian, or whether these be nominally

recognized, but covertly and virtually opposed, as in the Church of Rome, the name of antichrist is stamped in legible characters upon all those false-hearted followers of the Lamb, who know him not as the all-sufficient propitiation for their sins, and who cannot trust in him as their complete salvation. But let it be observed here, lest phrases, seemingly harsh, but too fearfully true, should be misconstrued, that of course no reference of an individual kind is intended here to those private persons who may profess papist or Socinian principles, and who are involved in error from educational ignorance, or perversions of doctrine imbibed from their earliest infancy. May the Lord have mercy upon the victims of false doctrine! To judge the persons of men belongs to God alone, and to their own master all men stand or fall. But the *teachers* of antichristian heresies we may justly denounce, nor can we be too severe against those who presume to substitute their fictions in the place of God's truth—and even if conscientious in their belief of error, this must not be considered to improve their condition or to make them more worthy of respect. It is however but rarely, in the case at least of that cruel church which has so long made traffic of the souls of men, that we can impute pertinacity in error to a conscientious, although blind faith. The contrary of this is too true—and the fatal reason of this blindness, which is wilful and malicious, rather than conscientious, must be traced for the most part to the cause assigned by Jesus: “And this is the condemnation; that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

But let us dwell for a moment on the apostle's challenge in the verse before us—“*Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?*” It is full

of comfort to the believer who is sorely tried with the soul-destroying errors of antichristian teachers, and well suited for the confirmation of his otherwise, it may be, drooping faith. For in reply to all the human doctrines which lead to self rather than to Christ, we may challenge their promulgators as "*liars*" against the truth as it is in Jesus. The epithet is a harsh one, but not more harsh than appropriate. It must also be fearlessly urged against those teachers, whether papists or Protestants by profession, who would fain rob us of our confidence in the blood and righteousness of Christ, and who presume to direct us to forbear reposing our trembling souls on the word of faith, lest in doing so, we should deceive ourselves, and perish in our sins. Another apostle has said, "Let God be true and every man a liar;" nor must we hesitate to strengthen our own faith or that of others, by the application of such a term to the subtle adversaries of the gospel, when we find them proposing to undermine our simple adherence to Christ, by their specious arts. "If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?" What but lament their irrecoverable loss! It behoves us then to repel every insinuation which tends to derogate from the person or work of Christ; and to account all to be liars who contradict any of those scriptural statements, which exhibit to us the rock of our strength and the sure foundation which God has laid in Zion. The Lord Jesus, he is our rock; and no other foundation can any man lay, than that which is laid—Christ Jesus. Upon this rock, and foundation of faith, let us then fix our guilty souls, immoveably persuaded that the gates of hell shall in no wise prevail against us, whilst to every reasoning of our adversaries we reply, "*Jesus is the Christ.*"

23. *Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father ; (but he that acknowledgeth the Son, hath the Father also.)*

In the latter part of the preceding verse we found our apostle connecting together the denial of the Son and of the Father ; that none might vainly imagine they could retain their allegiance to the august being whom we designate as the first person of the Trinity, whilst they manifested antichristian hostility to the divine person of the Son. John still continues to prosecute the same subject in the verse before us, his object being to enforce upon us yet more distinctly, that we possess no Father in heaven if we reject the Son, in whom alone we are the adopted children of the Highest. And here we must particularly notice that we are not told that he who denies the Son has *no God*. The sinner rejecting Christ has still a God, a fearful one, whose attributes are armed against his guilty soul. But this God, whom the antichristian rebel may affect to serve, will not receive his homage. Sinful man is by nature an alien, under wrath, and if he despises the "One mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus," for such an one there is a God who is "a consuming fire," and "who will by no means clear the guilty ;" but no way of access into his presence, for that is guarded on every side by the flaming sword of an avenging law. But how sweet to the believer is the inference which is implied though not expressed in the Apostle's words. "*But he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*" Yes, the believer can repose in the conviction that he has a Father in heaven, *because* he acknowledges the Son. His conscience testifies

within him that he acquiesces in the revealed counsel of God's grace. With what gladness of heart does he receive the unspeakable gift of the Son! so far from rejecting the counsel of God against himself, how does he flee to his eternal counsel devised for the recovery of his ruined soul! Instead of presuming to imagine that he can have a father in heaven out of Christ, how anxiously does he continually take refuge within his Saviour's breast, that in that hiding-place he may meet the eye of God, and be accepted in the beloved! And out of Christ, where is he? what is he? He often asks himself this question, and embraces his Saviour yet more closely: "O thou wounded lamb of God," he exclaims, "for me thou hast died and risen again; I have part in thy cruel death and sufferings, endured "for the sins of the world;" I have part also in thy resurrection which has made me righteous. In thy ascension too I have part, for I sit down with thee even now, wretched sinner as I am, at the right hand of God. And is not that God my Father? He has owned me for a child by the price he has paid, out of his own bosom, for my life. Thou wast his gift, freely given for my redemption, and thou art proved to be mine by my acceptance of thy divine person; an acceptance I confess, not of my own natural willing, but of his mercy who drew me to thy sacred feet with the cords of his own love. And now Lord, as thou art mine, so the Father also is mine. Fain would Satan persuade me to the contrary; fain would my unbelieving heart suggest, perchance I have not come to thee aright, for my works do not give due evidence of my faith; but yet I cleave to thee, Lord Jesus, as to my Father's gift, and to thy Father, as being mine also. I have no works of righteousness to produce, save some scanty ones which thy Spirit had made

more perfect but for the sin I have intermingled with them ; but from these imperfect works of faith, and from my manner of coming to thee I turn, thanking thee for my coming, and for all my attempts at righteousness, but still praying to thee to help me to renounce self more perfectly, that I may acknowledge thee more entirely, and in that acknowledgment know myself to possess the Father also."

How madly do those persons argue, who conceive it possible to enjoy the favour of a reconciled God, whilst Christ is not duly honoured ! If the Son be denied, how shall the Father be possessed, seeing that he is enjoyed only in and through his well-beloved Son ! God declares distinctly and unequivocally that he is to be approached only by Jesus, who as God-man is a mediator by nature as well as office. And proud man will yet presume to question the necessity of this medium of approach, and will challenge his right to call God his Father, whilst he refuses to bend the knee to the anointed Jesus. But in vain are his attempts, either to dispense with the help or to withdraw himself from the authority of Christ. If the person and offices of Jesus are despised, rebellious man is still subject to his sovereignty. God's decree is not annulled, because his creature would fain oppose it. Far from this, it is in full force, and the truth remains on record, " Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." If Christ be rejected as a Saviour and compassionate high-priest, he is still a mighty potentate, to whom all authority in heaven and earth is committed by the Father, and who is constituted head over all things to his church ; and if unacknowledged in his names of love, he must at last be feared as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But again we turn to the more pleasing view of those who

delight to know him whom the Father honours, and who in their consciousness of love to Jesus, are enabled to apply to their soul's comfort the inference which may be so fairly deduced from our Apostle's words, and which is so properly supplied in our translation ; "*but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*" For necessary as it sometimes is to enter into the nature of that antichristian warfare which the wicked carry on against the Son of God, our main business in connexion with the study of this epistle consists in establishing the truth itself ; and this, for the edification of the saints, rather than in attempting to refute false doctrine by the detailed exposure of particular errors. "I would have you simple concerning evil and wise concerning that which is good," is an apostolic saying which should never be lost sight of, for it may sometimes happen, that the time which might be more happily occupied in the exhibition of Christ is engrossed by the confutation of error. But still, bearing this in mind, we must also admit, that the apostle's prayer for the Roman converts would be answered most perfectly by their being found in a condition, not of actual ignorance as to the existence or nature of false doctrine, but in a state of freedom from its contamination ; and that this very purity is also in very many cases maintained, by the fearful consciousness of abounding error ; a consciousness which is altogether opposed to participation in evil, and which produces a caution which had been otherwise unknown, and such a sense of the continual need of the protecting care of God, as perchance had not been felt, but for some such knowledge of abounding iniquity.

24. *Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.*

The apostle John now follows up his doctrine in regard to antichristian teachers, with an exhortation to believers, and a suitable admonition as to the means by which they may escape from the infection of pestilential errors. He says, "*Let that abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning ;*" or in other words, 'hold fast the doctrine already delivered to you concerning the person of Christ, and do not cease to remember that Jesus is not only God over all, and the only wise God, but also God our Saviour, and Emmanuel, God with us. Forget not that which ye have heard from the beginning in regard to the name of your Messiah, and why he was to be called Jesus. Forget not the Gospel message, and the glad tidings of salvation through Christ the Lord. Let the simple narration of the birth, and life, and death, and resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, abide with you ; yea, let it abide in you, having a lodgment in your inmost heart, for it is by this simple narrative of facts, which ye have heard from the beginning of your faith in Christ, that that faith must still be kept alive and ever more increased. And it is only by means of that which ye have already heard of Christ, that ye can successfully oppose the antichristian lies which are forged in connexion with his name, and which shall be offered you by heretics in lieu of that doctrine which alone has power to save. Retain, then, the simple truth as it is in Jesus. To this truth cling as to your precious life. It is your

life, for if it shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son and in the Father."

And is not the believer sweetly and powerfully exhorted in these words of apostolic guidance, dearly to prize, and firmly to hold fast that word of life, which has set him free from the condemning power of the Law ; from sin, death, and hell ? John speaks of that which the believer has heard, that is, of the word of the Gospel, the word upon which faith reposes, as soon as it is quickened by that word. And that which the believer is said to have heard may also be applied to the word and voice of Christ, as distinguishable from any mere word or voice of man. The Father has spoken from heaven to the believer's heart by his Son. Oh, believers, retain that which ye have heard, nor let the memory and sense of those accents of love die away from off the tablets of your hearts ! Ye have heard the Shepherd's voice. It must be so ; for Jesus says, " my sheep hear my voice." And surely ye can attest that it is even so. Your experience bears witness to the truth of that delightful statement. Not only has the word of grace sounded in your ears, not only has the minister of the word, duly commissioned by his Lord, announced to you that Christ is your salvation, Jesus has himself told it you. He has said, " Fear not, I am thine." The Father has revealed his Son in your hearts, and from time to time ye have exclaimed, " Behold ! the voice of my beloved." (Cant. ii. 8. 11, &c.) That voice has been recognized by your waking spirits at a time perhaps when sleep had almost overpowered your souls ; (Cant. v. 2, and 1 Thess. v. 6.) and again have you distinguished those tones of love which ye had heard in the beginning.

But pleasing as it is to the believer to be reminded of the Lord's peculiar visitations to his soul, and in-

voluntarily as he is led into such thoughts and reminiscences, it is not strictly proper to refer the apostle's words in the passage now before us, to those *internal* revelations which God is pleased to make to the souls of his adopted children ; for although it is true that Christ often speaks to their spirits audibly when no voice is heard by the outward ear, and this perhaps especially in the commencement of their life of faith, and also that they do well to retain the impression of his gracious words, it is more than probable, that here, the beloved John, intends only to direct the attention of believers to that doctrine of Christ which God has connected with the salvation of their souls. A little farther on in this epistle, we shall find our inspired teacher insisting strongly upon the evidence of the internal anointing which the believers had received from Jesus, (an unction of which they were no doubt conscious themselves,) but here he evidently speaks of that word, which has respect to truths external to the believer, that is, of the word which records the facts relating to the person of the Son of God, and of his works performed on earth for man's sake. Not that any saving truth or recorded fact of God's word is in such a sense external, as not to be internal also, that is, internally received by faith ; but still we must carefully distinguish between the work of Christ achieved for us, and our own apprehension of that work ; between the word of Christ's testimony in the Scripture, and his application of that word in our own hearts ; in short, between the clear and abiding testimony of the speaker Christ in the page of Holy Writ ; and that still small voice of the Spirit, whose announcements, unquestionable as they are, are yet from their very nature, in a measure evanescent. Now because these latter an-

nouncements are in a degree fleeting, and also because they are identified with a particular state of experience and of feeling, and this at one time it may be, rather than at another time, (God suiting his peculiar dispensations to the peculiar circumstances of his people,) on this account, these particular visitations can never become a secure stay for the believer's faith. Indeed it is necessary at all times to look without rather than within, for the confirmation of our souls, and that we eye the record of God's love as it is recorded in the Scriptures, rather than our own individual consciousness of that love. It is sweet to be assured by the voice of Christ speaking internally to the soul, that "he loved me and gave himself for me," but faith does not so legitimately repose itself upon the warrant of this inward testimony, as upon the fact that God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Again we repeat, it is the belief of the truth itself, the belief of the fact of the life and death of the Son of God which brings life to the believing soul. No internal work or knowledge of the believer's; but a work altogether external to himself, though appropriated and made his own by faith. And these remarks are not altogether uncalled for, as we find so many believers in Christ looking too exclusively to what is sometimes termed, (though improperly) their sensible experience. It is well, as before observed, that all such experiences should be engraven in the memory as testimonies of the Lord's love; and at the same time it is well that the soul believe itself an object of God's love, not so much however because of such internal visitations, but rather because "Christ died for sinners," of whom it has discovered itself to be the chief. And

here is rest indeed, here is consolation for the sinner's soul. He says not, that sweet internal experience abides with me, which the Lord at such or such a time once gave me of his love, (although it is well that he should say this too,) but rather, "that which I heard from the beginning," is fast rooted in my heart. The doctrine of salvation by the blood and righteousness of my incarnate God is lodged within my soul. Long ago I heard in the word of the truth of the Gospel, "that Christ was manifested to take away the sin of the world; that he receives sinners, and saves such; that in him the Father is well pleased, and with all poor sinners in him; that his people are clothed with his righteousness, made holy, and accepted in himself, the Beloved. All this I heard, and it abides within my heart. I live upon this record of God's love. It is my life. By the faith of the Son of God, and the testimony of Scripture that he loved me and gave himself for me, I now live. The belief of these glorious facts unites me to the Father and the Son. For in the contemplation of these truths, heard from the beginning, I find myself increasingly united to God. "In him I now live, and move, and have my being." One with Christ, by the clear testimony of the Scripture, I retain the belief of my state of privilege, and so continue in the Son, and in the Father.

How lamentable is the case of those persons who appeared at one time to be well grounded in the doctrine they had heard from the beginning, but who eventually, to all appearance, have made shipwreck of the doctrine of faith! The believer looks upon such cases with an enquiring eye and trembling heart, anxious to be resolved upon the fearful mystery! He says, "Was that faith really so sound as it appeared to be? Was

that knowledge indeed the knowledge of the Son of God ? If so, what security have I, that my faith is the faith of God's elect ? Are my evidences of grace more bright than theirs were once ? Alas, no ! How clearly did their light shine ! How perfect did their knowledge appear to be ! Apparently, they were indeed the Lord's devoted followers ; they had renounced self, in words at least, and Christ was, as far as we could judge, all their salvation and all their desire. But after a time they ceased to follow Jesus. They sought for a righteousness of their own, in which to stand before God. They said that the Spirit had not sanctified them, when they before believed as they supposed in Christ, but that he would sanctify them and make them *holy* in themselves, if they were faithful to his new guidance. And so they renounced Christ and his righteousness ; they renounced the doctrine of faith in the blood of Jesus, and betook themselves to the delusion of a newly-devised law of works. Meanwhile, the Holy Ghost testified no more of Jesus, as a Saviour from all sin, and as the fulfiller of a legal righteousness for his people. No more he witnessed of Christ ; he took not of *his* to show to the soul, (John xvi. 13, 14) but according to the testimony of these persons, he now led them to suspect the soundness of the doctrine they had heard from the beginning. Now the Spirit testified of man's power to be righteous in himself, and no longer gave him conviction of his sin as of a stain which could never be effaced save by the blood of sprinkling. Now the creature, not Christ, was to be all in all ; and God was now to be glorified, not by simple faith, but by the creature's holiness in himself. That therefore which had been heard from the beginning was renounced, and a new doctrine adopted in its stead. "The word of faith "

once so greatly valued, became despised ; and (oh that it might be, that only the appearance of such a downfall was exhibited !) the blood of the covenant, by which they had formerly been sanctified, was now accounted as an unholy thing ! Apparently they forsook Christ ; apparently they trampled him under foot ! But oh that the reality may have been far different from this ! Oh, that the Lord, who sees not as man seeth, may yet have discerned them “ looking again toward his holy temple.” (Jonah ii. 2—4.) That the Lord may yet have heard a voice, inaudible to man, pleading with him for mercy, through the one atoning sacrifice for sin ! That in the last momentous hour of life, Jesus may have been again acknowledged, and his pitying aid besought. Or if not this, may the Lord at least have recognized in their dying souls some marks of his elect ! may he have yet seen the image of his Son, indiscernible to man, implanted there ; and beneath those spots, and that veil of unbelief apparently so dark, may he have discovered faith, his own imperishable gift !

And amidst these triumphs of the enemy, whether they be complete or only partial, the saints look on dismayed, saying within their troubled hearts, “ And we too may one day perish by the hand of Saul ! ” But let it not be imagined that such doubts are encouraged, as some pretend they are, by our apostle's seemingly conditional phraseology in the text before us ; for nothing could have been farther from the beloved John's intention than the one so ignorantly assigned to him. For how can we reasonably impute any such design to a teacher who is addressing believers with the particular object of increasing their joy in the Lord ? The apostle could not suppose that the faith of his readers would be confirmed by an intimation, that perchance, their faith,

so highly extolled, might fail at last. Impossible. He must have known that their souls would be cruelly dismayed by any such erroneous view, and that the counsel of God's grace would be fatally dishonoured, should it be thought that the faith of God's elect was a mere human principle, and dependant upon man's vigilance for its perpetuity. But this all-important matter has already been considered in the exposition of a former verse, and the truths there insisted on, need not be repeated here. On the present occasion, therefore, it may suffice to observe, that John's phraseology does not in fact imply any doubt, as to the final perseverance of those in whom the Lord has commenced a work of faith by his own newly-creating and almighty power. His expressions only instruct us, as to the means, by which God perpetuates the faith of his elect; and this in order that we may comply with the prescribed rule, and so be found persevering to the end. And is it not plain enough that when God decrees a particular result, he appoints also the means by which that result is to be achieved? Not, as though the means might perchance be neglected, and yet the result still be gained, if desired by God, (as the wicked say, who maliciously oppose the truth of the Gospel;) but in order that the saints may be informed of the good pleasure of the Lord, and walk therein. Now to the saints, God says, "I have given you faith to believe in the name of my well-beloved Son; and as ye received that gift of faith in connexion with the doctrine heard from the beginning, so that faith must be perpetually maintained and cherished in your hearts, by means of the same doctrine. Behold, therefore, your path of duty, and let that abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning. Already ye are "in the Son and in the Father;"

accepted in my Beloved, in whom I am well pleased, and made my children by adoption and grace ; and in this state of privilege I appoint you continuance and confirmation, by the use of the prescribed means."

Nor let the wicked vainly imagine that they can measure the godly by themselves, or judge of what the righteous may be disposed to do in certain circumstances, by what they think that they should do in similar ones. The ungodly objector cavils at the idea of the saints persevering in the right path, when they affirm that the issue of their course is not doubtful. If not doubtful, say the malicious adversaries, you may then live as ye list, for why take any heed to God's commandments, if ye are sure, as ye say, of winning the prize at last. Do what you will, if elect, ye must prevail : then why walk by rule ? Alas, these wretched cavillers consider not that God's people have a new heart and a right spirit renewed within them. They know not that the saints walk in a continual fear, lest they should still miscarry, and miss the desired haven ! They know not that so far from the saints taking courage to sin, because grace is secured to them in perpetuity, they are of all persons the most anxiously solicitous about their final perseverance. No doubt it may appear a paradox to the unbelieving, who cannot understand the seeming contradiction ; but the believer will not be ashamed to confess, that often when he thinks himself most sure of heaven, he is most tremblingly alive to the importance of giving "all diligence to make his calling and election sure." Nor need we, as far as the ungodly are concerned, attempt an explanation of these apparent contrarieties, except by observing that they appertain to the believer's present state of necessary imperfection, and that however unintelligible they

may be to the natural man, they are the usual and proper experience of the saints. But to the saints themselves, these seeming contradictions are made clear, nor are they perplexed by what are paradoxes to others. They perceive a fitness in walking by a prescribed rule, towards an appointed end, and consider that a fearful anomaly would take place, were they to propose to themselves to gain the desired end, except in the use of the appointed means. Besides, they cannot but find their present enjoyment of God in the path he has assigned them. The Father and the Son are continually revealed, whilst the obedience of faith is maintained, and without such continual manifestations of the Father and the Son, the believer's spirit begins to droop and languish. And can the new creature be happy whilst sensible of any decay in his reception of the grace of God? That cannot be. The believer is therefore impelled to cleave to the law of his God, by that instinct of his new nature, which prompts him to desire communion with the Father and the Son; and so he holds fast by the commandment, 'not only that he may endure unto the end and be saved, but that he may enjoy an ever-present fellowship with God. And upon this view of the matter, what becomes of the reasoning of those carnal ones, who imagine that God's children can only serve him duly, when they have respect to that future recompense of reward which is promised to the godly? The faithful cannot live, except they inhale the breath of life; and the truth of the gospel abiding in their hearts, is to them this breath of life. Let the action of this truth upon the believer's heart be suspended for a moment, and in what a wretched condition is he found? how does he pant and struggle, as for his precious life! In the gospel element of the love of God

in Christ, he lives and has his being, and truly the believer is as tenacious of his spiritual life, as the natural man of his life of nature. Surely, more tenacious; for sometimes the natural man, unduly excited by a feeling of nature's misery, will endeavour to cut short his wretchedness by cutting short his life. But what should prompt the spiritual man to forego his new life in God? Can afflictions, can persecutions, can distresses effect this? Impossible; for these must infallibly drive him closer to the Almighty Friend who is engaged to succour him in every tribulation. And can the world and its allurements, can sin with its enticements, prevail with the believer to renounce his hope in God? This too is impossible. For he says to God, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and who is there upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee?" The believer accounts even the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. How much more then does he prefer union with his Lord, to fellowship with the wicked, and the enjoyment of their favours! He says deliberately, "Let me suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." And how then shall sin overtake and overcome him? How shall sin subdue him whom it cannot beguile? There is no enchantment that can prevail against Jacob: no divination of the enemy, however potent, that can effectually deceive Israel. (Numb. xxii. 23) His eyes, anointed with the eye-salve of faith, discern "theland that is very far off." Faith brings it near. His eyes have seen, and still see, the King in his beauty. How then shall he not endure unto the end and be saved? How shall he not persevere in his life of faith? How shall he not continue in the Son and in the Father? He would not relinquish

his life in God for ten thousand worlds ! He would not let go his Saviour's love, for all that the wide universe can offer in exchange ! And can he be compelled to part with Jesus ? Can he, against his will, be violently forced away from Christ ? No such possibility of compulsion is hinted at in the word of God. On the contrary, " Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely ; " free grace, life, eternal life, is for those who will have it. And do not believers will to have it ? Have they not been made willing to love God, in the day of God's power ? Truly they have ; and still they are willing, increasingly willing to be saved, and loving God more and more, and so must obtain the desire of their hearts. Their expectation cannot be disappointed, for it is from God. Their hope cannot be made ashamed, for it is an anchor, cast, not in the bottomless deep of human promises, but within the veil, and upon the rock of God's unchanging word and love. Thrice happy souls that are in such a case ; happy the people who have the Lord for their God ! Surely the word heard from the beginning remains in them, and they also continue in the Son and in the Father.

As the case has been adverted to of those, who in our own time and day, and under our own immediate observation, have apparently, almost, if not quite, made shipwreck of their faith, we would subjoin a few remarks in connexion with that melancholy subject, before passing on to the consideration of another verse. And the principal suggestion intended to be offered is this : that believers will do well to rest their faith simply on the word of God, and not allow it to be shaken by any appearances of defection which their brethren may exhibit. True it is, that at such a time, such and such

believer appeared eminent in faith and holiness, and too true it is, that their faith and love is now eclipsed. But let us remember, that we were never able to penetrate into the hearts of those believers, so as to ascertain the reality of their faith, nor are we now in full possession of all the circumstances attending their condition in God's sight. The imperfect state, therefore, of our knowledge of others, should suggest to us the propriety of forbearing to try any particular truth of God's word by any appeal to man's uncertain history. To infer that the saints do not necessarily persevere to the end, because such and such an individual, once apparently eminent in faith and holiness, has *apparently* not persevered in his integrity, would be a most absurd conclusion. It may be, as before hinted, that the Lord discerned the faith of his elect, and the image of his Son, when man could see only shameful declensions from the truth of the gospel; or it may be, that the Lord never knew the soul which was supposed to be of his planting, and that he never acknowledged the specious works which exhibited so fair a show to man's imperfect vision. All along, the seemingly sincere believer, may have been no more in God's sight, than "the degenerate plant of a strange vine." It behoves us then to look away from man to God, and to remember, that even if all men be found liars, God is true. But Satan will harass and distress our minds by these antichristian defections, and he will not fail to suggest that they afford reasonable ground for doubt as to the certainty of our own perseverance. Many a venom'd dart will he inject into our minds, even whispering to our hearts, "Where is now thy God?" Truly such trials of faith await the followers of the Lamb. The shield of faith then must be firmly grasped, and opposed to the Devil's

fiery darts, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, must be wielded in the conflict. Nor must the Christian soldier's breastplate be forgotten. The invulnerable armour of the righteousness of God's own Son must cover the believing heart. And the warrior's head must not be without its due defence. "The hope of salvation" forms a helmet impenetrable to the assaults of hell.

But if the thought of apostacy from the faith inspires the believer's heart with fear; if the declensions of his brethren sound an alarm in his soul, like to his own death-knell, will he not the more carefully guard against the possibility of the lie being verified? Surely he will do this, and will cling yet more closely to his Saviour-God. Surely he will hold fast the truth, by which he may continue in the Son and in the Father. He will inquire for the old paths and will walk therein. The word "*heard from the beginning*," will engross his anxious care. He will study its import, he will meditate upon its momentous truth. Day and night will find him occupied in the same work; the work of making his calling and election sure. He will again and again survey his title to eternal life. He will accurately examine the title-deeds of his heavenly inheritance. Every clause in his Father's will, every word in the last testament of his elder brother's love will occupy his care. And is the result of this careful scrutiny at all doubtful? What can be its issue, except that the believer will resolve to comply with the apostolic injunction, not to cast away his confidence which hath great recompence of reward? (Heb. x. 35.) What can be the possible termination of the believer's renewed investigations of the word of God, but this only; that his faith in the gospel of God's grace, will be more and

more confirmed, and his confidence in God his Saviour evermore increased. Finally ; what can come of all his trials, in the view of the many wounded who are cast down, and the many strong ones slain around him, (Prov. vii. 26.) save new appeals to the faithful God, who has said to his confiding people, " A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee ; because thou hast made the Lord thy refuge, even the most High, thy habitation." (Psalm xci.) Truly the believer's conflicts of faith shall all issue in a more perfect trust, that " he that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty ;" (Psalm xci. 1.) That when the pestilence of error walketh in darkness, and the destruction (of false doctrine) wasteth at noon-day, he shall have no just cause to fear, because God has said, " No evil shall befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." " Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence." And again, " Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him : I will set him on high, because he hath known my name." Know then, ye ransomed of the Lord, amidst all your fears and discouragements, that " the Eternal God is your refuge, and that underneath you are the everlasting arms." (Deut. xxxiii. 37.) " Be strong and of a good courage ; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed ; for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." (Josh. xix.) Oh, believe it, thou tempest-tost, and afflicted with many doubts ; " Happy art thou, O Israel ! who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord, who is the shield of thy help, and the sword of thy excellency ! And thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee."

25. *And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.*

This verse is connected with the preceding one, and gives us a clear insight into what the apostle intended by the expression "that which ye have heard from the beginning." For it is now evident that the former doctrine in which they had been instructed from the first, and which he exhorted them to hold fast, was no other than "the hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." (Titus 1, 2.) It is then "*the promise*" of God which is to abide in us, and which we are to retain evermore with an unwavering faith; even that promise, which is the pledge of our eternal life. But what is the nature of this promise, and wherein does it consist? a more particular consideration of the subject may be properly attempted in connexion with the words of the text.

Now it is evident from the testimony of the apostle Paul, in his epistle to Titus, which has been already quoted, that the promise in question cannot be referred exclusively to any or all of the promises of eternal life, given to man by his gracious Creator, of which various promises we have the record in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament. Not that the promises given in time, have no connexion with the promise which was given "before the world began," for far from this being the case, they are intimately allied, and inseparably connected, although not so allied as to be identical. And this will appear to be the case, if we inquire more particularly into the nature of these several promises. As it regards those made in time, they were, as we well know, made to man, to whom they had respect. The

promise "made before the world began," had also respect to man, but it was not made to him, for he was not then created. To whom then was that first promise given ? That first promise, which was "made before the world began," and to which all the promises given afterwards in time had respect, secretly indeed at first, (because the mystery since made manifest to the saints, was hidden from the ages and generations of the past) but now openly, in these last days of gospel light ? Surely the question is soon answered, and the reply made, that He to whom the promise was originally given, is no other than the Son of God, our divine Mediator, our Creator. (Col. i. 16 ; John i. 3, 4.) The promise was given to Him whose delights were with the sons of men, (Prov. viii.) even before God created man in his own image and likeness. The promise of eternal life for the church about to be created, was committed to him for whom it was created. (Col. i. 16.) To the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and who was God, by whom all things were made, and without whom was not any thing made that was made ; even to Him was confided the promise of an eternal life, for the people He was about to form for Himself, that they might shew forth his praise. And for ever be renounced the vain unscriptural imagination, that the promise of eternal life was an after-thought springing from the mercy of our God, an after-thought, subsequent upon the fall of man. No such theory has any foundation in the word of God, which speaks distinctly of a predestination of the church to eternal life, "before the foundation of the world ;" of a predestination of God unto the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ to himself, "before the world began ;" in which fore-ordained counsel of God, respect must have been had

also to man's foreknown defection from the law of God, a defection only to be repaired by "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

We behold, then, in the light of Scripture, a people who are the heirs of an eternal promise; and a promise of never-ending life, vested for them in the hands of a divinely appointed mediator and Saviour. And this is the promise to which the apostle directs our attention. But as before observed, this promise, made before time, is allied to other promises made in time, to man himself, of which promises we have also the record in the word of God. And may we not add, that these promises stand recorded also in the hearts and minds of those who shall inherit them for ever? that they are transcribed in living characters by the finger of God the Holy Ghost upon the souls of the elect? Most assuredly they are, and to these promises they look as to the charter of their heavenly inheritance. To these promises, so free and so immutable, they cling, as to the documents which prove them heirs of heaven. And all the many and varied promises made in time to fallen man, they discern to be linked closely with the first promise made before time to their elder brother Jesus; and it is this union (discovered to them in the Scripture and by the teaching of the Spirit) that confirms their faith, and enables them to confide in the counsel of that God who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Had the counsel of God's love to them in his Son, been a mere after-thought subsequent to their fall in Adam, and had that fall itself been as contingent as some say it was, and as doubtful as their own hopes would then have been, upon how comparatively insecure a basis would the believer rest his confidence in God. True it is, that man is bound to confide in every word proceed-

ing from the mouth of God. Although that word should appear isolated and detached from other words of God ; although one command or promise should not appear distinctly or intelligibly connected with another command or promise, still if it be God that speaks, man cannot withhold the submission of his faith, without an impeachment of the divine veracity. But still the believer living in the full blaze of revealed truth, is doubly bound to return thanks to the Father of mercies and God of all consolation, that to him the mystery is revealed which was hidden from the ages and generations of the past, and that for the ' strong consolation of the church in the latter day, God has unfolded to her view the connexion of all his varied words of promise, and the symmetry of the perfect whole, decreed in his eternal counsel. Nor let any imagine it a light matter to be admitted to an inspection of the ancient record of God's covenanted love to his church. Prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which our eyes behold, and they saw them not. The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are unfolded to us, and are we not therefore blessed ? We have been pronounced such on the account of our superior knowledge of these mysteries, by one who cannot err. Jesus has said, " Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear." Nor should any be deterred from the joyful inspection of revealed mysteries, by a fear that they may err in an undue scrutiny of things not revealed. True it is that man is ever prone to wander from the prescribed path, and the believer has reason to know and to lament that the imaginations of his heart are still in part evil ; but yet the sin is great of refusing to acquaint ourselves with God as fully as we might do, lest perchance we should commit some error whilst we follow on to know

him. Nor let us suppose that it is at our option to receive the portions of truth we imagine to be best suited to our powers of apprehension, and that certain views, clearly revealed in Scripture, are nevertheless unprofitable for us. Such an opinion contradicts the wisdom of God, and tends to a despiteful and disdainful rejection of the loving-kindness of the Lord. It is strange that any believers should be found, who perseveringly deny that it is expedient for the church to be acquainted with the antiquity of the promise of eternal life made on her behalf to the Divine Mediator, and who suppose that it is enough if the believer's faith rest upon the promises of God made in time to the children of men. For if the promise made in time, is as they say enough, and that it behoves them to know nothing of the eternal counsels of God concerning themselves, are they not in this judgment of theirs at issue with "the only wise God," who is graciously pleased to inform them, that their calling in time is the result of his counsel of eternal love? There is a fitness in the knowledge of the choice of a people in Christ before the world was, or God would not impart to us the decrees of his grace; and it is to be doubted whether the church could repose as securely as she now does upon the word of promise, did not her faith connect the word vouchsafed to man in time, with the word given to the Son of God before all time; in behalf of a people whom he should create, and afterwards redeem and sanctify, and ultimately glorify, according to the good pleasure and counsel of his Father's will.

There is an objection in some minds to any doctrines which bear however remotely upon the awful subject of election, because it involves, as they suppose, the reprobation of a portion of the human race without any

peculiar demerit of theirs, and worse still, without any possibility of escape from a ruin brought on them by God himself. But the believer's acknowledgment of the eternal designation of a people who should be saved by grace, to set forth the manifold perfections of God, does not necessarily involve any such view of reprobation as is commonly supposed to be an integral part of what is called the Calvinistic scheme. The admission of the Scriptural truth, that some plants are of the Lord's planting, and that such shall never be rooted up, does not involve, what is not a Scripture truth, that all were once planted by God, and that afterwards, some, thus planted of God, were plucked up by his own hand. Far different from this is the statement made by Jesus in the Parable of the Tares. For there we are instructed that the children of the kingdom are the plants of the Lord's planting, but not so the reprobate who shall be rooted out at the last; for their production is not assigned to God, but to him whose children they are called by the same divine instructor. (John viii. 38—47.) To imagine that God in the foreknowledge of the fall of man, decreed to save some of the fallen race and to reject others, although all were alike interested in his love in the day in which God created man in his own likeness, is to suppose that God can cast away his people whom he foreknew, which the Scripture pronounces to be a thing impossible. But that the God who loves unto the end those whom he once loves, will yet suffer an accursed race, whom he never knew with approbation, to mingle with his people, as tares corrupt the wheat, is a fact distinctly signified in the parable already quoted. That God created the wicked for the day of evil, is a proposition not found in Scripture, although it is sometimes quoted from the sacred oracles; for the idea of

original creation is not conveyed in the often-quoted text, albeit it is confessedly God's purpose to make of the same clay vessels unto honour as well as unto dishonour. But the difference is great between the execution of God's justice upon the vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction, and the fulfilment of his counsel of love towards the vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory. (Rom. ix. 22.) And let us not fail to observe, that whilst in the latter case all is of grace and mercy, there is long suffering exhibited even to the vessels of wrath. And how ill does this suggestion of the inspired Paul agree with those views which would seem to imply the possibility of change on the part of God, and to affix also to his holy name the imputation of his being the author of sin !

The foregoing remarks have not been offered in the vain attempt to explore that counsel of God which is hidden from man, or to explain the difficulties that force themselves upon our minds in the consideration of the Lord's dealings with his creatures ; but rather for the purpose of opposing any such theological views as cannot be proved to derive their origin from the word of God. Nor is it to be doubted that many sincere minds are led to reject much consolatory truth, because that truth is linked in their apprehension with certain theological statements which they cannot receive as the unquestionable truth of God. Now such persons injure their souls, by the non-reception of those mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, to which, humanly speaking, they might attain, but for opposing prejudices ; but great as this fault is, it is not so great as the error of those who excite their prejudice, by unwise expositions of the divine counsels ; expositions too often carelessly derived from the traditions of men, and which are far

from being the result of their own patient investigation of the Scripture, or the fruit of the blessing of the Holy Ghost upon their individual studies. It is probable that much mischief is done to sincere enquirers after truth, by the heartless mode of teaching, which some it is to be lamented have adopted, and do still adopt, in discoursing upon the abstruse counsels of the blessed God. It is true that the intellectual pride of man is to be abased, and his proud reason dethroned in the presence of his God ; but alas, those who attempt the work of demolition, too often exhibit an unskilful hand. They attempt, (vain hope,) to compel the intellectual acquiescence of the natural man to the expositions they propose. Strange infatuation ; to suppose that human reason can accede to propositions which shock every one of her perceptions. By the aid of the weapons supplied from the armoury of reason's logic, the stupendous counsels of the great God are said to be made clear ! Whilst faith can only acquiesce in what is dark, and humbly trust her God, confiding in his unseen wisdom, love, and power ; bold reason, assuming the name and guise of faith, pretends to tear away the veil which conceals the secret righteousness of God, and to disclose, not only to the church, but to man's carnal understanding, the nature of the impenetrable equity of the Most High. No wonder that the mad attempt should issue in the scorn of wicked men, and in the alarmed discomfiture of the church. The infidel still unconvinced, mocks on with a more infuriated rage, and believers receive into their hearts many an arrow, inflicting a pain which faith only can assuage. To explain in what manner God is just, when the Scripture leaves the matter unexplained, is a rash attempt, and tends to no real spiritual illumination of the mind. Reason may

sometimes give a feigned acquiescence to statements which she may imagine are distinctly proved, and in this way the natural man may sometimes, as he thinks, gain a victory over his very reason, by humbling himself, as he persuades himself he does, to the reception of unpalatable truths. But whilst reason is thus active and apparently submissive, where is faith meanwhile? She resides, not in the head, but in the heart. She cannot be convinced by any human logic: her only teacher is the Holy Ghost. She does not say, "I see now how God is most holy, just, and good;" but '*I believe* he is most righteous, merciful, and wise; *I feel* that he is the blessed God who cannot err. I am fully persuaded that the judge of all the earth must needs do right; and I know in whom I thus believe, for it is in the Father revealed to me by the Son; it is in the Son revealed to me by the Father; and it is in the Holy Ghost who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and who confirms and expands in my soul the knowledge derived from both.' It may be repeated without fear of just confutation, that cold metaphysical expositions of the principles of the divine government, do not tend in the least degree to the satisfying elucidation of any one abstruse point. The Scripture is never coldly metaphysical. The blessed God who knows our frame, and who remembers that we are dust, feeling for his children more than a Father's tenderest pity, and Jesus the compassionate Saviour and high-priest of our profession, who has himself assumed our nature, and has taken part in all our sorrows, and the Holy Spirit, our guide into all truth,—all, Father, Son, and Spirit, direct a different method of instruction. Not that man's intellect is to be cast aside, or his reason dethroned, in the sense which some fanatics affirm to be proper; not that

man's affections are to be addressed to the exclusion of his understanding ; no such course is suggested as the right one. But this is meant ; that the Scripture model must be adhered to, if man's spiritual profit is the thing designed ; and that the whole man must be addressed, always beginning with the heart, by which alone " he believes unto righteousness ;" (Rom. x. 10.) a statement which is fully verified, whether we take the term righteousness to mean the righteousness of justification, which is its obvious signification in this text, or whether we apply it to the equitable administration of the great God. It is agreed on all hands, that the righteousness of Christ can only be obtained by the faith of the believer's heart ; and it is no less true, that the inscrutable equity of God can be apprehended in no other way. It is by faith, the faith of the heart, that the believer perceives and knows of a truth, that the sovereign God, the mighty potentate whose judgments are past finding out,—that Jehovah the Lord, does all things righteously, and according to the equitable rule of His own all-wise and perfect will.

In the consideration of " the promise that God hath promised us, even eternal life," the believer is led to contrast his eternal life " hidden with Christ in God," (Col. iii. 3.) with that natural life derived to us from our father Adam, in whom we rather die than live, as the Scripture abundantly testifies ; our natural life, properly speaking, being now no more than a species of death. And if we attempt a comparison of the first and second Adam, as the earthly and spiritual heads of the church, how striking is the difference which suggests itself at once to our view in the all-important particular, that Adam was not, like Christ, invested with a promise of eternal life on behalf of his seed, but was

placed under the threatening of a law of death, which too surely presaged the evil it seemed intended to avert. No promise or covenant of life is recorded on that page, which instructs us in the history of the first man; but instead of a promise we find a threatening; "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." A fact, with its fearful sequel, which should induce all to consider well, whether indeed the threatening of death is of equal efficacy with the promise of life, for too many are found who suspect the peculiar efficacy of the Gospel of the grace of God to deter from sin, as compared with the power of the terror of the Law. But the history of our first father gives no encouragement to such a preference to the avenging law, as though it were the best schoolmaster in the ways of holy obedience. Adam, as far as we read, was not encouraged in his duty by any promise of God's abiding love and never-failing mercy. His strength lay only (as far as it appears,) in the fear of punishment. His obedience was to be maintained by his having respect to the doom denounced against transgression. He was upheld, then, or was to be upheld, by a principle of fear, not of love. For although it was most true, that from his first creation Adam's life was hid with Christ in God, we are not told that any such disclosure of God's love was made to him before his fall. Upon the commission of his grievous sin, and when he had entailed on himself and his posterity the just sentence of death, then it is that the wonder-working God lets him into the secret of a new life to be derived to his dying soul from an unknown source. The seed of the woman is promised to bruise the head of the enemy who had beguiled him to his ruin. In other words, that eternal life promised before the world began, is now mentioned for the first time,

and the mediator indicated, in whose hands that life had been deposited. And now behold the dying soul of our first father reviving under a *promise*. Adam had begun to die. The death of trespasses and sins had taken hold of his guilty soul. Already he is alienated from his God, and become his enemy by wicked works. But shall he remain God's enemy? Shall the carnality of his mind increase to a still greater ungodliness? The love of God interposes the promise, and the dire catastrophe is averted. The word of grace intervenes, and the entire and permanent apostacy of the elect church is prevented. Adam, who could not be induced to maintain his allegiance by a threatening, is now brought back to that allegiance by a promise. What the law could not do, grace effects. The will, not to be rightly moved, even when self-interest might have prompted obedience, becomes pliant, when the promise tells of mercy for the culprit, and of pardon for the lost. Adam possessed all, (Gen. ii. 8.) and should have loved his God, the giver of all. Adam possessed innumerable gifts, the tokens of his creator's bounty, and we are astonished at the disaffection of his heart to one so bountiful. But it appears from the brief history of our first parent's fall, (strange as the matter may seem to us) that Adam admitted into his mind, doubts of the love of his all-gracious God. These doubts were infused into his mind by "the Father of lies," (Gen. iii. 4, 5.) but they were not rejected, as we should have supposed they must of necessity have been; on the contrary, they were cherished, and they issued in a daring and malignant violation of the divine law. The precept, which did not enjoin the performance of a single duty, but only the non-performance of a mischievous act, and which was therefore, of all other laws, so easy, one would

think, to keep, was yet shamefully violated upon the first temptation. But when man had wantonly lost all, *through his base tampering with the suggested doubts of his Creator's love*, again he recovers all—and how ? *By faith in the love of God.* In passing the just sentence of his death, (for God must needs execute the threatened sentence,) the benign creator discloses life in death ; and Adam, who before had believed, on the suggestion of the Devil, that God unkindly withheld from him the fruit of the knowledge of good and of evil, now discovers to his soul's wonder, that God does not withhold from him the gift of his own Son, but freely gives him up as the ransom of his justly-forfeited life ! After this discovery of gospel grace made to Adam, we read no more of any acts of rebellion on his part, and we may safely infer, that although he failed to love much in return for much bestowed, he loved much in recompense of much forgiven ; and that the confidence in God which failed to be produced by the munificence of his Creator's temporal gifts, arose spontaneously in his heart, when he found, that having destroyed himself, his help was still in God, that God was still his Father, although his justly-offended Father, his Saviour, his deliverer, the originator and promulgator of the life-giving word of promise.

It is no displeasing work to the pious mind, to trace the footsteps of the elect flock, from the period of its first expulsion from paradise, up to the time in which the promise was fully accomplished in the birth, and death, and resurrection, and ascension, of the Son of God. We behold the infant Church driven out into the waste and howling wilderness of sin and death, but carrying in her heart a seed of faith, too firmly rooted there to be any more eradicated by any power of hell.

We behold her the bonds slave of Satan, whose servant she became in the hour that she hearkened to his accursed voice, and consented to do his accursed will ; but still we see her, " saved by hope." She has heard of a Seed to spring from her womb, who shall bruise the serpent's head ; a deliverer has been proclaimed to her, who shall through death, destroy him that has the power of death, that is the devil. And now she travels onward in her dreary pilgrimage, still cheered by hope. She sustains innumerable pains, dying daily, and yet lives, for there is life within her soul. The promise is engraven there. It was spoken by the mouth of God. The word was spirit and life, and now she lives by the faith of that life-giving word. Satan oppresses her with cruel thralldom. Far worse than the Egyptian tyrant, he would make her serve in a more bitter bondage than that of mortar or of brick. He would make her the slave of every lust, the victim of all unrighteousness. By means of his varied powers of temptation, he would fain make her not only " earthly and sensual," but altogether like to himself, " devilish." But the promise prevents this. " The flesh shall indeed lust against the spirit," but happy truth, there is a spirit in the elect Church, given her of God, which also lusts against the flesh. And so we discern righteous Abel overcoming by faith, and we see him, " by faith offering a better sacrifice than Cain," " who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him ? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." And next we behold Seth, the depository on earth, and heir of the same promise. To his mother's faith it was revealed, that he was appointed to her of God for " another seed, instead of Abel whom Cain slew." (Gen. iv. 25.) Enos succeeds to Seth :

and "men then began to call upon the name of the Lord." And next we read of "Enoch who walked with God, and who was not, because God took him." And of "Noah who found grace in the eyes of the Lord." But in Noah's time, a new record concerning the promise-bearing Church attracts our notice. The sacred page instructs us that the wickedness of man was so great upon the earth, as to need a total excision of the guilty race from off the face of the whole world. Meanwhile the promise remains with Noah, who was "the heir of the righteousness which is by faith," (Heb. xi. 7.) and to him sundry new and gracious promises were given; lest the church, affrighted with the Lord's vengeance on her fellow men, might fear a like judgment on herself, and by that fear be driven from her confidence in God.

A new and more distinct enunciation of the promise made to our first parents on the occasion of the serpent's doom, next meets us in the history of Abraham. And it is delightful to observe that the light of the promise shines more and more brightly, as the Lord proceeds to unfold his purposes of love. The promise made to Abraham is more distinctly pregnant with life, than the promise to man inferred in the serpent's doom. Man had before heard that his cruel enemy should be destroyed by a deliverer hereafter to appear; and from that foretold destruction of his oppressor he would necessarily foresee advantage to himself. But the precise nature of the advantage remained untold. It is now proclaimed to Abraham. To him God says—"In thy seed, that is, (as Paul interprets it) in Christ, shall all nations of the earth be blessed." It had been predicted before, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." Now it is added, "in that

seed all nations shall be blessed." And shall we not do well to observe the increased familiarity that appears to have existed between God and man, after the utterance of the last-mentioned promise? Of Abraham we read that "he was called the friend of God, (Jam. iii. 2.) and justly so, for we find that Jehovah deigned to designate him "Abraham my friend." (Isa. xliii. 8.) But from whence this blessed intimacy on the part of Abraham? from whence this new boldness of converse with his God? Surely it was derived from the life-giving word of promise, now promulgated with a clearness unknown before. "Abraham saw the day of Christ, and he rejoiced to see it, and was glad." (John viii. 56.) And the joy of the Lord became his strength. He who knew himself to be but dust and ashes, a death-stricken, hell-deserving sinner, yet pleads with God his attribute of righteousness, as a reason why he shall have mercy on his servant Lot. (Gen. xviii. 23, &c.) Surely Abraham now recognized the truth of his adoption in Christ, and realized his condition in the covenant of grace, in a way unknown to his fathers. And the same may be observed of "Isaac, and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." How assured is their confidence in the love of God, how firm their trust in his covenanted grace. In every trial how boldly do they appeal to God, and in every mercy how clearly do they discern the dawning fulfilment of the promise! And how unwavering was that patriarchal faith which was grounded on the word of God. No tribulations can dismay the constancy of those all-enduring men; no variety of evil can affright them from their hope. They cling to the promise. This is the anchor of their hope. The promise of the Lord, again and again repeated, again and again confirmed. Bereft of all, wanderers in strange

lands, disconsolate, afflicted, they yet possess a country, a city, a happy, happy home. But where is their habitable earth; where their abiding dwelling place; where the varied good which gives felicity to man? All is in the promise—They possess all there; and by faith in the same word of God, “are saved by hope,” patiently waiting for that which they see not. Again we find the promise renewed to Moses, another highly favoured friend of God, (Exod. xxxiii. 11; xii. 6, 8.) and the honoured instrument of the deliverance of the captive Church. And now the Lord distinctly claims a people for his own, amongst the families of men, and proclaims that Israel is his son, his first-born. (Exod. iv. 22.) The fact of the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, is from henceforth avowed, although not with the clearness which belongs to the period of the more full manifestation of the sons of God. But yet, how bright and glorious was the new dispensation, compared with the comparatively dark one, blessed as that was, under which the patriarchs sojourned in the land of promise. Promise upon promise now meets the ear and eye of faith. How sweetly does God testify his love to Israel, by the mouth of his servant Moses; “Yea, he loved the people! all his saints are in thy hand. The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord!” (Deut. xxxiii. 38.) But how shall an adequate detail be attempted of those expressions of the divine regard, which Jehovah vouchsafes to lavish on the seed of Abraham by the mouth of his servant Moses. And it is not only by the friend

of his people (and truly Moses was their friend,) that he will utter to their hearts words of life-invigorating promise. He will also compel their enemies to sustain the prophetic office for the full assurance of his people's faith. For who is it that proclaims to Jacob that God hath beheld in him no iniquity, and to Israel, that his perverseness is not seen by the Lord's all-searching eye? It is no other than the cruel Balaam, who loved the wages of iniquity; and who would have cursed Israel but from the Lord's irresistible command to bless.

In addition to the promises of grace, mercy, and peace, already as we have seen, multiplied to man, the shadows of good things to come were now exhibited by the command of God, in the institution of the levitical priesthood with its sacrificial rites and festive solemnities. Every legal type was an emblem of some mercy to be derived to Israel through her expected Messiah. The thrice-recurring yearly feasts had respect also to Israel's hopes. In all, in every thing, the promise was discernible. Throughout the complicated ritual, the church discovers intimations of her recovered union with the Lord; every link in the vast chain binding her more closely to God her Saviour. And prophetic benedictions are added to shadowy rites. Behold a gifted race appointed of the Lord to proclaim his love to Israel! To the law the prophets are annexed, and the light shines more and more towards the perfect day. The ancient counsel of God begins also to be divulged in terms which must have been understood by some. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love," says Jehovah by his prophet, "and therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." And concerning the promised seed, the divine mediator, with whose illustrious person the church's hopes are all identified, how

many are the glowing delineations ! In vision, Isaiah beheld the glory of Christ, and spake of him. (Isa. vi. 18. John xii. 41.) And how wonderfully does he portray the person of the Lord, his offices, his work, his life, his death, his kingdom, and the blessedness of those for whom a feast of fat things is prepared, a feast of wines on the lees, of wines well-refined. Nor are his brother prophets behind him in the work of benediction. If love surpassing human thought has been depicted by an inspired pen, the Lord's expostulations with his people, by his servant Jeremiah, must ever occupy a foremost place amongst such records. Who shall describe the intensity of love unfolded there ? It must be felt to be conceived in any measure ; but adequately conceived it cannot be ; its length, and breadth, and height, and depth being such as passeth knowledge. And Ezekiel performs his work of consolation with equal blessedness. He also tells of an adoption altogether irrespective of the creature's deserts ; describes the love which embraces guilty polluted man, and which forsakes him not, however flagrant his delinquency. (Ezek. xvi.) We follow on to Daniel, " greatly beloved," and find him the honoured instrument of consolation to the church. For he predicts Messiah's kingdom, the overthrow of the church's enemies, and the final blessedness of the saints. Nor do the remaining prophets, minor though they be called, failed to contribute largely to the church's joy. For what says the Lord by the mouth of his servant Hosea ? " I will betroth thee unto me for ever ; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord." And what by his servant Joel ? " My people shall never be ashamed ; and

ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and none else, and my people shall never be ashamed." By the mouth of Amos, God also testifies ; " In that day," (the gospel-day of the full revelation of Christ,) " I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it, as in the days of old." (Amos ix. 11. Acts xv. 15 — 17, and iii. 21.) And by the mouth of Obadiah; " Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness." Nor does the Lord proclaim his love to fallen man, and his enduring kindness to his people, less distinctly, in Jonah's impressive record of God's dealings with Nineveh, and with his own soul. Still we find the same God " gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and that repenteth him of the evil;"—the same God who spared Nineveh, that great city, " and who passed by the iniquity of his servant." Micah too, gives the church many a precious promise by the word of the Lord; " I will assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; and I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation; and the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion, from henceforth even for ever." He tells too of him who was to be " ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." And it is Micah, who in admiration of Jehovah's dealings with his church, exclaims, " Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy; he will turn again, he will have compassion upon us, he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old." It is also the prophet Nahum who assures the church that "the Lord is good; a stronghold in the day of trouble, and that he knoweth them that trust in him;" who proclaims, "thus saith the Lord, though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more, for now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder:" "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace." And the divinely-instructed Habakkuk thus confirms his own and the church's faith. "Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One?" "*We shall not die.*" "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come and will not tarry." "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." "The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hind's feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places." Zephaniah is no less encouraging. It is he who says, prompted by Zion's Almighty friend, "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee; thou shalt not see evil any more. The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy

over thee with singing." And what says the Lord to his church by his servant Haggai? "According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you : fear ye not." And it is Haggai who tells of the glory of that latter temple into which the desire of all nations should come, and in which the Lord would give peace.

Zechariah is alike prophetic of blessing to the church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven : he thus speaks at the mouth of the Lord : "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye." "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her. Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion ; for lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord." And it is by the Son of Berechiah, that God foretels the bringing forth of his servant, "the branch," and the laying of the one stone, upon which shall be seven eyes. By him it is that the Lord thus speaks : "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion ; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem ; behold thy king cometh unto thee, he is just, and having salvation, lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." "The word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi," is the last of the inspired enunciations which precede the advent of the long-promised Messiah. And how does this word begin? "I have loved you, saith the Lord." Israel's provocations had not induced their Almighty benefactor to "cast away the people whom he foreknew," for "the Lord, the God of Israel, saith, that he hateth putting away;" nor could Levi's sin prevent the fulfilment of the promised blessing ; Levi had shamefully corrupted the covenant of life and peace, but what says the Lord? "Behold I send my messenger, even the messenger of

the covenant, and he shall prepare the way before me, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son, that serveth him."

A few of the "exceeding great and precious promises" given to the church during the patriarchal and legal dispensations, have been adduced in evidence of God's gracious method of dealing with his elect people. And these promises have been but scantily gleaned from the books of Moses and the prophets. But what copious treasures remain untouched; and how attempt to set in order the words of spirit and of life contained in the historical books of Scripture, in the book of Job, and above all in the Psalms of David, and in the writings of Solomon! Or how hope to compress within any reasonable limits, the multiplied records of divine love and grace, which flow from the pen of the sweet Psalmist of Israel and from that of his inspired son? The effort is not made, not because the task would be any other than a pleasing one, but from its hopeless nature. The fruits of this garden of the Lord's planting, are too varied to admit of any due selection. The leaves which are for the healing of the nations, too profusely scattered to admit of their being gathered up. An attempt has been made to follow the church of the first-born, during a period of four thousand years, and to mark the progress of the life which she derived from the promises of God. And at the coming of Christ we behold her faith in a good measure turned into sight. The seed of the woman was revealed. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made

under the Law. to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Now the title to heaven, so long spoken of, was actually given. The freedom from sin, so long promised, was actually bestowed. God would no more tell of a deliverer to come, who should bruise the serpent's head : behold, the deliverer is come out of Zion. He appears on earth, he wages war with the powers and principalities, with the rulers of the darkness of this world, with spiritual wickedness in high places. He enters the lists with the God of this world, and "through death destroys him who has the power of death, that is the devil." No more shall the future opening of the prison-doors be proclaimed by any prophet of the Lord. Isaiah performed his office blessedly, but it need not be repeated. The prison doors are open, and cannot be closed again. They have been opened at the cost of the life of the Son of God. From henceforth who shall shut them ? "I am he that openeth, saith Christ, and no man shutteth ; behold, I have set before thee an open door." (Rev. iii. 7, 8.) And shall they any more testify of sin to be forgiven, and removed ? Christ has made an end of sin. He has obtained for us eternal redemption. And why proclaim any more, that righteousness shall be the heritage of the saints ? Christ transferred that precious gift to his people, and made his church the righteousness of God in himself, when he was made sin for them. (2 Cor. v. 21.) The church then entered upon altogether a new era of her spiritual life, when the dispensation of the kingdom of heaven, succeeded to that of the Law and the Prophets. The promise had almost entirely sustained her hitherto, but from henceforth, she is to live mainly upon the facts, which prove the actual fulfilment of the ancient promises. The language of the church is not now the

same that it was before the coming of Christ. Faith, indeed, has always respect to the same objects, but the expression of that faith varies, in proportion as its objects are more or less clearly discerned. Abraham rejoiced to see the day of Christ, and he saw it, and was glad ; but did he behold it, as we now behold it ? Impossible ; Christ himself attests the contrary. It must be granted, however, that whilst the faith of the Christian church is grounded upon the facts of the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, these facts can never be contemplated, apart from those ancient promises of God which these facts accomplished. The church then, even now, lives by the faith of the same words of promise, which sustained the spiritual life of their predecessors under the Law. And although it must be acknowledged that we possess an increase of blessing, and that the faith which rests upon the fulfilled word of God appears doubly secured, still it must not be forgotten, that the believer can never repose his faith so perfectly as he ought to do, upon the facts recorded in the Gospel history, except he connects those facts with the promises which foretold their existence. Nor will this view of the matter be displeasing to those, who would not willingly part with any one of the gracious words, which have at any time proceeded from the mouth of God ; every notification of the Lord's favour being dear to the believer's heart, whilst that demonstration of love is necessarily most precious, which has been manifested in the consummation of the promises ; even the love which has superadded facts to words ; which has shown us the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, as well as told us of him ; and which in fulfilment of the promise, and of the types and shadows of the mighty sacrifice, has exhibited to our adoring eyes the actual Lamb slain

from the foundation of the world ! (Gal. iii. 1.) And shall not the love that has now poured out upon us the Holy Ghost, so long predicted, and that has caused us to enter into the kingdom of Christ, spoken of by the prophets, be duly acknowledged by us ? and shall we not rejoice that our lot was cast, not in patriarchal, not in legal, but in Gospel days ? Not that we would boastfully imagine ourselves more beloved of God than those former saints, some of whom it is probable far surpassed us in faith and righteousness ; but still we must confess the superior dispensation of the grace of God, under which we live, in the good providence of God. A dispensation appointed us, not for our merit's sake, but of the Lord's goodness, and according to the purpose of him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise." To us belongeth shame and confusion of face. To thee the prerogative of exercising mercy in thy church, according to thine own good pleasure.

The church of the last days has been described, as resting her faith mainly upon the facts of the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus ; but yet not so as to make it unnecessary, that she should any more contemplate the promises made to the ancient church. It has been shewn that she still lives, in a measure, by that word which God spake at sundry times, and in divers manners, to our fathers by the prophets. But it is also evident, that she now lives upon new promises, super-added to the old ; upon gospel promises, which are linked with the "better hope" now brought into the world. For what exceeding great and precious promises has Christ himself given to the church ! No more he speaks in parables, but (John xvi. 25.) he tells us

plainly of the Father's love, and of his own love, and of the love of the Holy Ghost, and predicts distinctly, that Father, Son, and Spirit, will dwell from henceforth and for ever with his people. But how enumerate the multiplied promises now afforded to the Christian church in the last dispensation of the grace of God? If the attempt to make any thing like a due selection from the promises of the Old Testament was almost hopeless, how shall any success be expected, when the New Testament is the treasury to be explored! The very many last words of God, which are calculated to sustain the believer's life in the kingdom of his Lord, cannot be set in order here. But happily, there is no need for the recapitulation of them all. The mention of *one* of them is enough, even the one selected by our evangelist in the text, "*And this is the promise that he hath promised us—Eternal Life.*" For into this promise all other promises may be resolved; in this one promise all centre, and have their accomplishment. And it may be affirmed with truth, that to this one blessed consummation of the believer's hope, all the varied and multiplied, and widely diffused promises of the word of God, have respect, even from first to last; from the first promise indicated in the serpent's doom, and given, prior to the expulsion of our first parents from paradise, to the last promise contained in that apocalyptic vision, which disclosed to the apostle's eye "the Tree of Life,"—true emblem of our immortality in Christ.

26. *These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.*

The apostle proceeds now to explain the cause of his

admonitory zeal. His primary object in writing to the church, he had declared at the commencement of this epistle. We have found him saying, "These things write I unto you, that your joy may be full." But now a tender solicitude possessed his heart, lest the disciples might be robbed of their full joy, by the specious falsehoods of seducing teachers. Two things therefore our apostle greatly desired. The one was to establish the church in her most consolatory faith, the other to prevent her from casting away her confidence, which had great recompense of reward. And he is now, as we find, occupied in the latter work. In exhorting, in admonishing, in bidding beware of seducers, in detecting their anti-christian principles, and in pointing out the antidote for the threatening evil. And can we not now, at this time, and in our own day, perceive the need of the same apostolic zeal and caution? Alas, the church is still surrounded with lying spirits, transformed into angels of light. No sooner is Christ revealed in our hearts, but false Christs, and false prophets arise, feigning our master's voice and words. Oh Jesus, preserve us from these wolves! Their sheep's clothing deceives thy simple ones! But thou canst make us sharp-sighted to discern their fruits. Thou canst unveil to us their hypocrisy, their hollow zeal, their little love of thee, their desire to exalt self at thy expense, and at our expense. Thou canst unfold to us the real nature of their will-worship, and of those multiplied observances, which they would fain impose upon the people thou hast delivered from the ceremonial law. O Lord, thou hast most graciously set us free from a yoke, which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear; and wilt thou suffer thy people to be again so far beguiled, as to suppose that thy work needs any addition of ours to

make it perfect? Forbid it, Lord: oh, deliver us from the craftiness of men who lie in wait to deceive. Our eyes are directed unto thee. Guide us with thine eye, and in thy light cause us to see light!

It is a lamentable fact, that the Church of Christ is in all ages surrounded with enemies, and that she is never safe from the machinations of pretended friends. But ought we not to add, shall that be lamented, which takes place by the direct will and counsel of God? The apostle Paul tells us, that there must needs be heresies amongst us. And why? That the faith of the saints may be approved, and that the Lord may be glorified in the stability of his people. Their stability then is assured? It is. The Spirit of God resides with his church. Now and then a sheep may wander from the fold. Even the shepherds may sometimes neglect their own safety, and the safety of the flock, but the Spirit is not altogether withdrawn. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," says Jesus; and again he says, "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth." And in this assurance, the saints take courage, committing their cause and ways unto the Lord. They cannot but deplore the anxious strife, which appears continually to threaten the permanence of their faith in Jesus, but yet they refuse not the appointed discipline. In unfeigned self-distrust, they look to the author and finisher of their faith, praying him that the faith which he has bestowed, may endure the fiery trial, and be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at his appearing. And they consent to be in heaviness for a time, through manifold temptations, "against hope believing in hope," that they, even they, poor silly sheep, "having returned unto the shepherd

and bishop of their souls," and evermore seeking his protection, shall be preserved according to the promise, "receiving the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls."

But how fierce is the warfare of their faith, let those say, who are not ignorant of the devices of the Devil, and who perceive the varied snares that beset their feet ! For on each side of the straight and narrow way that leadeth unto life, a variety of devious paths proceed, each one bidding fair to conduct the traveller safely on his way, but all alike fraught with peril. Sometimes the eye mistakes the thorny path of self-imposed austerity, for the rugged one of gospel self-denial. Sometimes the broad way of licentiousness, is mistaken for the liberty of the gospel. And should the faithful pilgrim be deceived in either case, how painfully does he retrace his steps, and what anguish of heart does he experience, till he is again pursuing the footsteps of the flock. Will-worship and licentiousness are the two devious paths which are indefinitely multiplied, and which meet the believer at every turn. To worship God in spirit and in truth, how hard is this ! To add nothing of our own to his prescribed rule, how almost impossible ! But having attained to our true gospel liberty in Christ, how equally difficult is it to maintain this liberty in loving purity of heart. O Lord, who is sufficient for these things ? Not thy erring feeble creature man. Oh no. But thou art all-sufficient ; thy Spirit is sufficient for our every need. If left to ourselves, we can only mistake, and stumble, and wander from the right way. We can only call evil good, and good evil. But thou canst make us wise, thou canst make us holy ; and for thy name's sake accomplish it, and for thy truth's sake perform the same !

It is not possible, by any vividness of description, or depth of colouring, to pourtray too glowingly, the alarm and anguish that affect the spirits of the saints, when they realize the full extent of the danger of error, as it is set before them in the unerring word of God, in the faithful page of church history, and in the refulfilment before their eyes, of the sad records of the past. For the pestilent errors, pourtrayed nearly two thousand years ago by the pens of inspired apostles, and the various heresies which have arisen since that time, are still rampant in the church. True it is that the Proteus of evil assumes new forms, but the same principles are discernible, under the new aspects of the god of this world. And if the many-headed Hydra has again and again been slain, we cannot but perceive from time to time, that his deadly wound is healed. Will-worship existed in the time of Paul, and when did it not exist during the long ages of Nicene and Papal superstition? Alas, that it should be found even now, daring to raise its rebellious front, in a Protestant land, and Protestant Church! And in apostolic days, some were found who used their liberty in Christ for an occasion to the flesh. And since that time, whenever Christ has been fully preached, as the king whose kingdom of liberty is established on the earth, carnal man has too often dishonoured him, by pretending, that they no longer owe allegiance to any law, either of man or of God. And still it is the same thing: licentiousness still reigns in many a heart under the fair cloak of gospel liberty. Nor can the saints contemplate these appalling facts, without experiencing much grief and fear. Some secure spirits, it may be, satisfied in the moderation of their own views, endure no anxiety of heart; they perceive no Charybdis on the right hand, nor Scylla on the left. Far from this, they

contemplate with tranquillity their own happy union of faith and works. They are brought into no straits of conscience, into no terrors by the way. Errors indeed they see, and great abundance of them, but they congratulate themselves, that they are far enough from being overtaken by false doctrine. Any extreme of will-worship they protest against, but they are not zealous for the worship of God in spirit and in truth. Licentiousness they abhor, but they are equally opposed to that true gospel liberty, which they think leads to licentiousness. In fact, they have as they suppose, reached the golden mean, between the two extremes of an ultra-faith and ultra-holiness. Their faith is without fanaticism; so they think; their holiness without superstition. Happy souls, secure in their moderation, who look on the tempest-tossed and afflicted church with an eye of wondering pity, bordering on contempt. But may we indeed call these self-complacent persons happy? The term must be retracted. Unhappy, thrice unhappy those, who know not that they are poor, and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked. Who know not, that the elect church is always such, in herself, on the earth. Who know not, that every hour, every moment, we should die a thousand spiritual deaths, but for the protecting grace of Him, who keeps his vineyard every moment; who, lest any hurt it, "keeps it night and day." (Isa. xxvii. 3.)

27. *But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you : but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.*

The apostle proceeds to reassure the minds of the believers, who might possibly be overpowered with dismay, in the view of the warfare in which they were engaged. And, let us observe in the first place, that he contrasts the anointing which they had already received from Christ, with the new doctrine which their false teachers proposed to them. Already, says John, you have received an anointing, already you are taught of God. Christ has been your teacher, the Holy Ghost your guide into all truth. Now, seeing that it is so, (and your own experience testifies to the fact) "*ye need not that any man teach you.*" You may safely dispense with the aid of those who would fain, as they say, instruct you in the way of peace and righteousness. Had you been up to this hour in darkness, had no light of truth as yet dawned upon your mind, it would seem reasonable, that you should accept of any teaching that professed to lead you to the knowledge of God. But to what end should you now be taught by man, in a matter clearly revealed to you by the Lord himself? rely therefore on the instruction which you have already received, and abide by its guidance. And what says "*the same anointing ;*" what is the lesson that it teaches you? A very simple one ; and it is this, "*ye shall abide in him.*"

It is delightful to find our apostle always reiterating the same point, and simply, again and again, fixing the believer's hope in Christ. He seems to know of nothing

but abiding in Christ. Union with Jesus is his oft repeated theme. If he insisted upon what the anointing had previously taught the disciples, it was only for the purpose of eliciting the main point in that teaching, viz. that they should abide in Christ. All tends, with him, to the same end : nor let us ever forget, that this is the cardinal point in our gospel theology. Much error may overtake the mind ; we may be sorely harassed, nay, we may be circumvented by false teachers, but if we abide in Christ, we are still secure. Then whatever else we may do, or may leave undone, whatever we may believe, or not believe, let us "*abide in him.*" Let us obey the anointing in this particular, for its guidance is most unequivocal. Whatever else of doubt there may be, there is no doubt here. The anointing excludes all doubt, it compels the believer's unqualified assent. It does indeed happen sometimes, that the Spirit *appears* to teach different lessons to different believers, on such matters of faith as are not obviously of vital importance. We find different individuals aver, that such and such particular portions of scripture do not convey the same meaning to their minds. One, as he affirms, is taught of the Spirit to interpret particular scriptures in one way, another in another way. But where do we find persons in whose hearts Christ has been revealed, who do not agree in that teaching of the Spirit which directs, to both alike, that they should abide in him ? The anointing speaks the same language to all the saints. To all it says " Christ is your life, your hope of glory ; " "*abide in him.*" But what is the anointing to which the apostle refers, and in what does it consist ? It has been described in its operation of teaching, but it may properly be asked, what is the nature of the power, capable of affording such a guidance ? The anointing

spoken of by John may be defined to be, the revelation of Christ in the believer's heart; the manifestation of his divine, all-glorious, and all-lovely person, in the soul now entered upon as his dwelling-place. This anointing then, is a something differing from faith, or the teaching of the word of God, and its mode of teaching is peculiar to itself. It is in harmony with faith, and the word, but it is not identical with either. Truly it may be defined to be, an instinct of that new life, which the soul has received by the revelation of Christ within it, so that its language is necessarily and instinctively, "*abide in him.*" The newly-formed tie impels to union with Jesus. It binds the Spirit's life to his. And the believer would do cruel violence to his renewed heart and life, were he to indulge for a moment the idea of not abiding in Jesus. The thought is despair and death; it comes from hell; the Devil is its author. But the instinct of the new life, rejects all such overtures of the father of lies, should there be any such rising in the carnal mind. "*Abide in him,*" is the never-ceasing whisper of the renewed spirit to itself. The whisper and dictate of that spirit of man, to which the person of the God-man has been revealed, and united by faith.

Should any object to the view which has now been given of the nature of the anointing spoken of by John, on the ground that the scripture is the only well-authenticated teacher of the saints, and that it would be dangerous to follow any guide save the word of God, the peril of fanaticism being confessedly so great, if that word is departed from even for an instant; it may be replied, that the anointing mentioned in the text, although it is confessedly the voice of the Spirit of Christ, rather than of the scripture, is yet in exact unison with the letter of the word of God. For the self-instinctive

admonitions of the new creature in regard to its abiding union with the Lord, do not, all must know, clash with the guidance of the scripture, which is ever inculcating the same lesson. But John was pleased on the present occasion, (or rather the Holy Ghost by John was pleased here) to direct believers, to follow the guidance of the instinct of their new life, instead of commending them to the teaching of the word of God. It must be borne in mind however, that John had already appealed to the guidance of that word in a former verse. And we have already considered his powerful exhortation, (verse 24.) in which he refers so strongly, to the words or doctrine delivered to the church, on the important matter of union with Jesus. We are therefore reminded, and no doubt, intentionally reminded by John, that there is a twofold teaching, to which the believer does well to take heed. The most obvious method of his instruction is the one first mentioned; that of the word. The least obvious mode, but one equally well authenticated, and as much to be followed, is that of the Spirit's instinct in the heart of the new creature; an instinct which is analogous with the conscience of the natural man, and as much to be obeyed by the spiritual man, as conscience is to be obeyed by the rational creatures of God. Nor is there any thing of enthusiasm in this. Most certainly if the natural man has a moral sense, and woe be to those who deny him such a faculty, the spiritual man has a spiritual sense, by which he discerns spiritual good and evil. True it is, that as conscience is not sufficient for the guidance of the natural man, without the more particular instruction of the law of God, so the spiritual sense in the heart of the new creature, does not supersede the necessity of the more accurate teaching of the evangelical scriptures. The very heathen,

consequently all natural men, have a law written in the heart, by means of which they have a consciousness of sin and of moral righteousness. (Rom. ii. 14, 15.) But still they need a more accurate instruction in the law of God, because they are under very grievous blinding influences, which tend to harden the conscience, and darken the eyes of the mind. And so in like manner, the believer, who is now born of the Spirit, and who possesses a faculty of discerning spiritual things, as he is only in part renewed, needs a continual guidance from without, as well as from within. The instinct of his new nature, does indeed impel him heavenward, and his affections tend necessarily to Jesus. He has also intuitive perceptions of spiritual truth, but yet he needs the explicit and accurate guidance of the word. He cannot do without the detailed direction of the evangelical scriptures. Every precept, every line, every word, is important to his full and perfect instruction in righteousness. For the life of the new creature, is not a mere spiritual instinct, however excellent, and blessed, and even divine that instinct may be, (and truly it is all this,) but the life of the new born soul, is also the life of the reasonable creature man. The heart then of the renewed man obeys the dictates of his new spiritual instinct of love to God, to Jesus, to his brethren, to holiness, whilst his understanding is submitted to the word of God, and inquires there, what it is that the Lord appoints, and what his holy will may be. And in this course, it may be repeated, there is no enthusiasm, no danger of fanatical delusion. The heart is sound, renewed by grace, and led by the Spirit. The mind is sound, renewed also by grace, and taking continual counsel from the word of God. Nor let any vainly imagine they can separate what God has joined to-

gether. It is at our peril that we make the attempt. If we are satisfied with what we imagine to be the Spirit's guidance in the heart, and are not equally solicitous to be under the guidance of the written word, our faith is delusive. But on the other hand, if we exalt the word to the prejudice of the Spirit's teaching in the soul, and presume to think that we shall not err, if we follow, as we say, the word alone; then the Lord will confound our pride of heart, and prove concerning us, that our supposed wisdom is but folly. He will put our merely intellectual light to shame, and will magnify against us the little children, and veriest babes in Christ, who knowing apparently very little besides, know at least this; that they are born of God, that they love him, that Jesus is their life, and that "*the anointing which they have received of him*" supersedes the need of human testimony, for "*it is truth, and is no lie:*" lastly, that the same anointing teaches them, "*abide in him.*"

It would seem that the beloved John anticipated the objections which the carnal mind would make to his doctrine of "the anointing," and "its teaching," for we find him insisting, as if to obviate any such opposition, that the same anointing "is truth, and is no lie." And surely his pointed intimation should not be lost upon us. It is indeed most significant and important. For how is the believer derided on account of his laying claim to this anointing! How is he despised, if he supposes himself to possess an endowment, which is now-a-days considered an unscriptural one, and an unnecessary one. The natural man, according to the popular theology, can it seems, with the Spirit's aid, and the guidance of the Scripture, direct his course heavenward. And how sound does this theology appear to many! The word of God is honoured. The Holy

Ghost is honoured. There is no setting aside of the revelation of God's will. Far from this, it is continually perused. And there is no pretence of doing any thing aright without the Spirit's aid, for his assistance is continually implored. Where then is the defect ? It is here. The *natural man* is supposed to have the power of effectually studying the word of God by the Spirit's aid, whereas this capability belongs only to the spiritual man. The natural man must become a new creature, that is, a spiritual man, before he can work effectively with the spiritual weapons of the Scripture. And the Holy Ghost resides only in the Church of the first-born. He guides into all truth, *those only who are Christ's, and who are, as such, joined to the Lord, and one spirit with him.* His general influences of illumination, may indeed, and certainly do, reach to the natural man, but his particular and constant, and saving operations extend to those only who have received "the anointing," which is truth, and is no lie. To those only, in whose hearts the transition from death to life has been effected, in whose hearts Jesus has been manifested, and Christ, "the hope of glory," revealed. And in spite of the ridicule of an intellectual and unbelieving age, let us keep fast hold of the doctrine of the new birth ; not as it is coldly preached by some, who make it identical with the baptism of water ; nor as others preach it, who make regeneration to be no more than a moral change in the natural character ; but as it is set before us in the Scripture, as a new life from heaven, a divine anointing, an actual participation of the Holy Ghost, a real union with the Son of God. Blessed statements of the word of God, and statements confirmed by the experience of the saints, who can testify to their truth from the inward witness of their

own souls, which have been made partakers of the heavenly life, of the divine anointing, of the indwelling of the Spirit, and of the revelation of the Son of God.

"But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you." A general view has been taken of the verse under consideration, but it may not be unprofitable to dwell for a few moments on some of its details. And perhaps it will not be uninteresting, to consider in what sense it is, that the anointing which has been once received by the Christian, abides in him. It has been already observed, that faith, and the anointing spoken of in this passage are not identical, and it will be apparent from what has just preceded, that "the anointing" has been supposed to be identical with the new birth, rather than with faith. The abiding nature, therefore, of the anointing, will not be interpreted to mean the perpetuity of faith, but rather the perpetuity of the heaven-derived principle of love to God and holiness, of love to Jesus and his saints. It is indeed exceedingly difficult to divide between the new birth and faith, a difficulty which will be apparent, if we observe the evident confusion existing on this subject in the writings of the greatest divines. But no particular accuracy is attempted on the present occasion, every thing like metaphysical enquiry being rejected as out of place, and the object now being only to give to the "anointing," the place assigned it in the Scripture. And that "the anointing, abideth," is a sweet truth; a word of consolation for the saints; who may believe that in spite of their sin, and harassing body of corruption, the life of the new creature is an inextinguishable life; that the holy principle once infused into the soul, is no more withdrawn, and cannot die; that if creature-love appears at any time predominant,

there is still true love to God deep seated in the heart, in which he has himself inscribed his law of love : that if the love of Jesus seem at any time to be eclipsed, he is still precious, he is still the Lord ; that if sin prevail, there is still within the breast an antagonist principle of holiness, a principle of submission to God's will, and of delight in his law. For although the affections of the new creature may languish, they cannot expire. No, they will rather take occasion from their very languishing, to rise into a brighter flame. For the troubled heart, conscious of its own defection, and of God's enduring goodness, is excited to a more vehement flame of love. It may be believed that the love of God, once kindled in the soul, experiences no second death ; many waters cannot quench it. And the same may be said of the love of Christ, of the love of holiness, of the love of God's most righteous law. If once quickened in the heart, these affections still endure ; they die not.

“ But as the same anointing teacheth you of all things.”

Our apostle informs us, that not only does the anointing teach, but it teaches of *all* things. But there is no greater difficulty in giving credit to this statement, than to the fact, that it is an instructor on the one point of abiding in Christ. For we know that the spiritual senses of the new creature, have not respect to his God only, or to the salvation of his own soul. By the divine intuition, which he has received from above, he also loves his brother spontaneously ; not because it is his duty to do so, and this duty is urged upon him in the Scripture, but of necessity, and by the powerful instinct of the anointing which he has received from Jesus. And, it is probable that the apostle Paul intended to convey this meaning, when he said to the Thessalonians, (1 Thess. iv. 9.) “ As touching brotherly

love, ye need not that I write unto you ; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." Indeed we cannot doubt, that the anointing spoken of by John, is the gift long ago promised to the Church, as one of the blessings of the new covenant of grace ; the gift of a peculiar teaching from God, by which all divine truth should be known, and which should make human teaching unnecessary. (Isa. liv. 13. Jer. xxxi. 34. John vi. 45. Heb. viii. 11. 1 John v. 20.) The teaching, then, of this anointing, is universal ; for it embraces the whole law of God. The two great commandments of the law are written in the heart of the new creature : "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind, and strength ; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." And does not the experience of the regenerate confirm this statement ? Assuredly it does. Does not the individual, in whose heart the love of God has been shed abroad by the Holy Ghost given unto him, find also, that the love of his brother is implanted there ? He does. And the instinct of brotherly love is as much a part of the divine anointing, as the love of God himself. Love to those who bear the image of Jesus, is as sure an impulse of the renewed heart, as the love of Christ himself. The varied affections of the new creature, which have but one and the same origin, and which flow together spontaneously from the same divine source, cannot be separated from one another. If the anointing teaches the believer to love God, it teaches him to love his brother also. If it gives the admonition to abide in Christ, it directs, as certainly, to continue in brotherly love, and to maintain that unity of spirit, which is the bond of the perfection of the saints.

"And ye need not that any man teach you." Thes

words have been already interpreted, as being applicable to the false teachers, against whom it was the apostle's object to warn the disciples. And they may be boldly appealed to by all regenerate persons, when seducers desire to infect their minds with heresies. For however great may be the authority of such men, whether apparently legitimate, or self-derived, their pretensions are to be utterly set aside by those who are conscious that they possess an anointing, which teaches them the very reverse of the doctrine proposed by the seducers. And in such a case it is evident that there need be no parley with error, under the specious pretence of humility. The believer, who is the subject of the divine anointing, would not evince Christian lowliness of mind, by affecting to think that a patient hearing should be given to doctrines, which contradict the internal convictions and perceptions of truth, which he has already received from the Holy Ghost. But the beloved John is far from inculcating on believers generally, that they need not that any man should teach them; and the saints know that much of their precious knowledge of divine truth is acquired by human teaching, and this continually. Far, very far is our apostle from directing the saints, to despise the instructions of such of their fellow-men, as are competent to build them up in their most holy faith. Self-sufficiency is the last lesson John would teach the church. Nor would he direct believers to the Spirit's teaching, as a reason why they required no farther aid of man to guide them into all truth. Such gross fanaticism belongs to those only, who are ignorant of the true condition of the body of Christ, and who know nothing of that speaking of the truth in love, by which we grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

who know not, or will not know, "that the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love ;" and who are wilfully blind to the great truth, that "he gave some apostles ; and some prophets ; and some evangelists ; and some pastors and teachers ; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Before dismissing our present subject, let us consider for a moment how directly the doctrine of the Church of Rome is opposed to that of our teacher John, in regard to the anointing, which he ascribes to believers. And it is evident, that not only is the right of private judgment denied by the despotic power which professes to have dominion over the faith of the church, but the anointing of the Spirit is alike contemned. No matter what may be the convictions of an individual, as to the reality of his spiritual anointing, all must give way before the dictum of the earthly father and master. The self-constituted judge refuses to acknowledge any appeal, save to his own authority, and fulminates his anathemas, against all who humbly believe themselves to be endowed with the power of discerning spiritual truth, and of judging of things that differ. True enough, there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as the right of private judgment in the church, all being bound to follow that same guidance of the word and Spirit of God, which is common to all. But let it not be forgotten, that what is common to all, is also proper to all, and

that in this way each believer must claim for himself, what he possesses for himself, even the individual anointing of the Holy Ghost. It cannot be denied that the apostle John supposes believers to be furnished with a faculty by which they are instructed in divine truth, and that to this faculty he appeals, when they are in danger of being seduced by false teachers. But what becomes, then, of the *ex cathedra* doctrines of Rome? They oppose the teaching already received from the anointing, and John says that the subjects of this anointing are to obey *its* voice. Nothing remains then, but that the thunders of the Vatican be despised, as no more than the idle explosions of puerile folly. But, alas, they are more mischievous, though not less ridiculous than the weak efforts of the infant, to scare his elders with weapons which he cannot grasp. For, alas, some to this day, "with conscience of the idol," still believe that it has a power to speak, and to teach, and to threaten, and to condemn. Human beings are still found, called Christians, who prefer the decisions of Rome, to the clear text of the word, and voice of the Spirit in the heart. And this they do, because of the supposed authority of the self-constituted oracle. They tremble in heart before the idol's frown. The pope is their God upon earth. The invisible God, the Holy Ghost, must give place to the visible God, seated in St. Peter's chair;—an infatuation, too gross to be believed possible in these days of gospel light and liberty, did we not know that it still exists, and but for the solution of the mystery given us in the Scripture. There we read, that God will send to some, "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie," and hence it is that they reject the authority of the word of God, the authority of "the Scriptures of truth," and the teaching of "the anointing, which is truth and is no lie."

From hence that potency of error, which alike degrades the natural and spiritual man ; which degrades the reason of the intellectual being, and does violence to every feeling of the new creature ; the claims of both being alike rejected, and their capacities for ascertaining truth, being alike denied.

It must, however, be conceded to the Church of Rome, that there is no certain truth out of the church ; that the church is the interpreter of the Scripture, and that should any instruction be received from the anointing, at variance with the judgment of the church, it should be suspected as unsound. But who or what is the church ? No Protestant believer will concede such a title to the self-elected church of Rome. He is most desirous of acknowledging the authority of the church, for he would not feel himself safe for a moment out of her bosom. It is there he dwells, it is there he seeks a response for all his hopes and fears, which if he should not obtain, he would become ill at ease, and suspicious of the soundness of his faith. But again the question recurs : who or what is the church ? If a true church, and the authority of a true church is acknowledged, where is she to be found ? The question is soon answered. The church exists wherever the due teaching of the word, and of the anointing, is found. Without the anointing, the word would be merely in the letter, cold and barren ; therefore although the word is itself the very instrument by which the anointing is conferred, it cannot stand alone, as the mark of the existence of the church. But wherever the word has fulfilled the object for which it was sent ; wherever it has quickened dead souls, and its ministry has issued in turning sinners to God, and his Christ ; there is the church, for its members are apparent. And with these members believers seek

communion. To these members they submit themselves, according to the direction of the Scripture: "submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God;" and again, "submit yourselves to them that have the rule over you," &c. "Whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation; Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." For let it not be supposed, that the Protestant faith inculcates in her free disciples, such a spirit as sets at defiance the all-important authority of the united voice of the faithful. There is a spirit of independence abounding amongst our Protestant churches, which is as much opposed to the true liberty of the gospel, as that liberty is opposed to the slavery of Rome. The humble believer trembles at the idea of an independent faith. He knows indeed that he must give an account of himself to God, and that he is commanded not to follow a multitude in doing evil. But he also knows, that he does not constitute *the church*, and this leads him to enquire continually for the footsteps of the flock. Unlike too many, who profess in these days a daring indifference to all that the body of the faithful have said upon any matter, he is fearfully alive to the danger of being found alone upon any one point of faith or practice. And it is well to mark the difference of the moral and spiritual man in this particular. The morally religious man, of an acute mind and independent spirit, is very tenacious lest he should have any truth imposed upon him, which he is not convinced is genuine; and he has an utter repugnance to receive the mere traditions of men as articles of belief. Nor is he to be blamed for this conduct. For in like manner the spiritual man rejects all doctrines founded on merely human authority, and is most jealous of committing his understanding or his

heart to the guidance of fallible man. But on what different principles do the two parties pursue their apparently like course. The moral man is very sensitive about his own integrity. He is afraid of injuring his self-respect. Provided he approve himself, to himself, all he thinks is well. But not so the believer in Jesus. He loves the truth for its own sake, and he is jealous lest man should dictate to him in matters of faith, not so much because he desires to retain the freedom of his individual mind, but because he is convinced that in this case, God can be the only teacher. He does not desire to assert his independence, or to maintain the liberty of private judgment; all he has at heart is the truth itself, the precious truth, the truth which he thinks rightly, none but God can impart. And there is no doubt that if we analyze the principle that gives birth in many cases, to what we are accustomed to call, a conscientious indifference to human opinions in matters of faith, it will be found a very faulty one, and by no means entitled to the unqualified respect which we are often disposed to give it. Its origin will be discovered to be self-will and self-seeking, rather than the pure and humble love of the truth of God. And the voice of the church is altogether set aside by these sticklers for the rights of private judgment. Her authority is utterly contemned. No holy fear possesses the minds of these boasting ones, when they contemplate their isolated condition, as believers cut off in faith and doctrine from the body of the faithful. Strong in self, and in the consciousness of what they are pleased to think their integrity, no matter to them, who may approve or who condemn. Their motto is, each one for himself alone, the interpreter of Scripture, and of the internal anointing of the spirit. Each one for himself alone, the

judge of the doctrine commonly promulgated as Scriptural, and of the evidence of the Spirit in the heart. Each one, were such a thing possible, his own church. But unhappily for their self-exalting scheme, the great head of the church annihilates their vain assumptions of independence, by his memorable promise, "Where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of you to bless you ; and if any two of you agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

The humble believer, then, in Jesus, who rejects with due contempt, the usurped dominion and unlawful tyranny of Rome, hearkens diligently to the voice of the true church : and his faculty of discerning the voice of the true church, amidst the lying voices that say on every side, "Lo here, and lo there," who tell of Christ in the wilderness, and in the desert, and in the secret chamber, — the power of discriminating the true church from the false, is communicated by sound doctrine, and the anointing of the Spirit. And should any reply, as assuredly many will do ; We too consult the scriptures, and we too have the anointing of the Spirit, and yet we acknowledge a different church from yours ; there is only one reply to make : "The Lord knoweth them that are his." If all appeal to the word, and to the teaching of the Spirit, and to the authority of what they term the church, there is an end of controversy. All that remains for us, is to endure patiently to the end, judging nothing before the time, but committing all judgment to the Lord, and meekly submitting ourselves to the vanity to which God has subjected the creature ; charitably embracing as far as it is possible, all those who differ from us in their supposed deductions from the scriptures, and the Spirit's teaching, and the authority

of the church. It is evident that we profess the same first principles. To what then, or to whom can we appeal, in order that our differences should be settled ? To nothing upon this earth, and to none save God only. And does not the thought now force itself upon the mind, that if God desires greatly, as most assuredly he does, the unity of his people, and that they "should all be of one heart and of one mind, and that they should all think the same things," (Phil. ii. 2.) that it is also his will, that the remaining blindness of the natural mind should yet be apparent for a season, even in the true church, confusing its decisions, and perverting the perfect agreement that ought to exist between all its members, and this for the exercise of his people's forbearance one toward another, and for the salutary, although humiliating display of their weakness and ignorance in themselves. But God nevertheless wills the unity and perfection of his church, and it actually possesses unity, and also a true perfection. Amidst all apparent diversities, amidst all apparent impossibilities of harmony, there is a true union of spirit in the Lord ; for there is one faith, one hope, one baptism. And there is one confession of faith—we repeat it ; amidst apparently varying creeds, there is but one and the same confession of faith in the churches of the saints. For what do all simultaneously declare to God and man ? That they are sinners, saved by grace alone. That their salvation is of faith, and not of works ; that boasting is excluded from their creed ; that Christ alone is precious, and worthy of exaltation ; that God is their Father, and the Holy Ghost their sanctifier ; that without holiness they cannot see God, and that God imparts holiness to those who shall dwell with him for ever ; that as time and opportunity is afforded, works that may be beneficial to men must be performed ;

and that God must be worshipped externally, as well as internally, according to the rule of his word ; that the new nature impels to the love of God and man, and that the saints are peculiarly dear for Jesus sake : Lastly, that the scriptures are the only rule of faith, and that these cannot be interpreted aright, save by the aid of the same Spirit that indited them.

28. *And now, little children, abide in him ; that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*

The apostle proceeds now to add a reason for our abiding in Christ ; and it is this : that when he appears, a holy confidence may possess our souls, and that shame and fear may not be our portion at his coming.

Upon the perusal of this passage we are at once struck with the mention of a twofold manifestation of the Lord Jesus, and are naturally led to inquire in what respect the appearing, and the coming of Christ, differ from one another. And the variety, and different signification of the words suggests the conclusion, that by the first of these expressions, the Apostle conveys the idea of the manifestation of Jesus in the hour of death, and by the second, his appearing in the day of judgment ; events, which demand an equal solicitude on the believer's part, and for both of which he is to prepare with an equal diligence. Nor is the distinction so unimportant a one, as those would fain persuade us it is, who are well pleased to renounce all hope of the manifestation of Jesus in the hour of death, and who only know, as they say, of the one appearing of the Lord which is to take place in the day of the Resurrection. But the Scripture tells us of more than one future manifestation of

Christ to believers. Already, Christ has been revealed in them, by the power of the new birth and of the Holy Ghost, and of faith, (Gal. i. 15, 16.) and he shall be more fully disclosed to the soul in the state of separate spirits. For on what other ground did the apostle declare, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain;" on what imaginable ground did he "desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better," unless he was persuaded, that a more glorious revelation of Christ awaited him in the hour of his death? It is absurd to have recourse to metaphysical abstractions, to attempt to prove that the believer cannot suffer loss, by being deprived of the consciousness of the presence of his Lord, for an indefinite period of time. If, on this earth, the believer is capable of holding converse with his Saviour, even during his seasons of suspended consciousness, that is, in the hours of sleep, what shall we say to the system, which dooms the Christian to the loss of Jesus, not for minutes or hours only, but for tens and hundreds and it may be for thousands of years? In vain are attempts made to satisfy the simple-minded Christian, that he will not be conscious of his loss of Christ, when the annihilation of his being takes place in the hour of death. He is conscious now that Jesus is his Lord. It is his privilege whilst on earth to endure, as seeing Him who is invisible. To sit down even now in heavenly places in Christ. Even now, he is "come to the assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven," and "to the spirits of the just made perfect;" and shall he indeed forego this sweet society, for the period of lengthened, although unconscious ages? Even now he is "come to the mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,"

and shall he in death lie in the cold and silent grave ? Shall Zion's mount be exchanged for the pit of corruption, for soul as well as body ; the city of the living God for the dark tomb ? And shall the ministering spirits minister to the saint no more ? Shall their kind offices cease at the moment of death, and will they *not* carry the believer's departing soul into Abraham's bosom ? And shall those who are now " come to God the judge of all, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant," lose for an indefinite period their fellowship with the Father and the Son, and their communion with that Spirit who now honours them with his indwelling presence ? Too truly this will be death indeed ! The death of sweet communion with the saints on earth, the death of fellowship with the spirits of the just made perfect, the death of all the offices of love now vouchsafed by angels to those who shall be heirs of salvation ; the death—chief and greatest loss—of the presence of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ! But Jesus says, that those who believe in him shall never die. Jesus affirms, that the believer cannot see death, because he is the partaker of an imperishable life. He it is who tells us, that the angels do not cease to minister to our souls when the mortal body is put off, for that it is then they perform on our behalf their most important service of love, by carrying us from earth to heaven. And why question the words of Christ, and the experience and joyful anticipation of Paul's faith, in order to adopt in their stead, the cold, heartless, death-like expectation of the materialist ? True enough, his creed is not cold, or heartless, or death-like, to himself, and he wonders at the Christian's repugnance to meet the death which he contemplates without dismay. The believer's inaptitude to be satisfied with a metaphysical abstraction in the stead of Christ's pre-

sence excites his surprise. He cannot conceive why the believer is so tenacious of the doctrine of the separate state. Again and again he urges on the saint, that his supposed loss of Christ's presence is only imaginary, and that the interval from death to the resurrection, however long it may be in fact, will appear to be nothing, if the soul is all along insensible. But all such vain quibbles, could they satisfy the believer's natural understanding, which they are far from doing, can by no means satisfy his repewed affections, which constrain him to cry out with the Psalmist, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God : when shall I come and appear before God ?" And must we not fear, that the heartless creed of materialism, betokens some undue coldness in the affections of those who embrace it ? Surely there is no want of charity in the supposition, but it is an irresistible and natural conclusion, arising from all the facts of the case. But blessed be God, the false creed of heretics cannot be forced upon the acceptance of the church. She still has her orthodox belief, fully proved by the word, and this consoles her in the knowledge that at death, her beloved and her friend, even Jesus, will appear to her happy admiring eyes, in a way of light and of glory unknown on earth ; that at death, a consummation of happiness awaits the soul in the presence of the Lord : that the beginnings of the redemption of the soul, commenced on earth, are completed in the hour of death ; and that in the resurrection-day, the restoration and the perfection of *body* as well as of soul takes place. And in this gradual developement of the perfection of the new creature, what of incongruity or unfitness can be discerned ? Rather, upon this plan, is not all in harmony with the

course indicated in the word of God? And what reason can be assigned for the death of the soul? The body must die, because it is a "vile body," and of the earth, earthly. The body must die, because "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." But believers are born again of incorruptible seed; so says the Scripture: and wherefore should this incorruptible seed perish? Why should the souls cease to live, which are already renewed by grace, and "made partakers of the divine nature?" No reason can be assigned for the death of the believer's soul; but abundant proof may be given that it cannot die. For already the renewed spirit has put on immortality; already it is clothed with the person of the divine mediator; "for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." And how shall that be separated which God has joined together? "He that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit;" a glorious union, which consecrates body as well as soul. For even now, "our vile body," is in a measure sanctified by its union with the Spirit of Christ. And the body which is "dead because of sin," (Rom. viii. 10, &c.) being allied to the Spirit which is "life because of righteousness," it shall be eventually quickened to a participation of the Spirit's glorious life. How much more then shall the spirit live, when it is disencumbered of its frail earthly tenement! Now it lives, being united to the Lord, in spite of the corruption of that flesh and blood which cannot inherit the kingdom of God. But at death the spirit enters on a more perfect life, the law of sin which was in the earthly members, ceasing to war against the law of the new creature; and in the day of the resurrection the victory over the law of sin and of death shall be complete, the renewed body as well as soul being then "Holiness to the Lord." And surely

the inference is clear enough from the portions of Scripture to which we have adverted ; and it must be acknowledged, that if the body is sanctified even now by union with the Spirit of the Lord, much more is the spirit sanctified. Also, that the spirit must of necessity retain the pre-eminence already given it ; a pre-eminence which it would altogether lose, could it die, or sleep, with the body, till the day of the resurrection.

How varied are the arts of Satan and his emissaries, in their multifarious attacks upon the believer's faith in Christ ! Should they fail to weaken his heart by infusing doubts of the present acceptance of the saints, and should the believer be able to plead boldly, that nothing shall be able to separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus his Lord, the envious foe will still suggest, that although no eternal separation can take place between the believer and his Lord, a separation of a certain kind must of necessity ensue, when the breathing living creature, ceases to breathe and live, and when, in plain terms, the souls and bodies of the faithful, which are in fact but one substance, die. But shall we therefore relinquish our blessed hope of a more perfect developement at death of the spiritual life, because the devil and his agents inform us, that we have in fact *no souls wherewith to live, in a separate state* ? Shall we at their suggestion, and their bidding, part with our most consolatory hope in Christ ? Forbid it, Lord ! Forbid it, Father of our spirits, to whom our troubled hearts look up, in the fear of even a temporary banishment from thy blissful sight ! In the hour of death receive our spirits into thy hands, and clothe them with the robes, in which thou dost array the souls of thy waiting saints. (Rev. vi. 9. 11.) In death, open to us the gate of a more perfect life. Jesus, admit us into

paradise ! Cause us to be with thee there ; let the penitent malefactor's privilege be ours ; now that thou art come into thy kingdom, remember us !

But in order that this blessed privilege may be ours, we must now, "*abide in him.*" So says our teacher John. Nothing but an abiding union with Christ now, can give us a just confidence, that when we are unclothed of the body, we shall not be found naked. Our inspired teacher Paul, instructs us also to the same effect. (2 Cor. v. 1, &c.) And shall any diligence of faith, shall any labour of love be accounted too great, to put us in possession of so vast a prize ; a prize which is indeed the reward of grace, and not of works, but which is nevertheless to be obtained in the way of gospel faith and love ? Nor is there ought of legality, much less of undue selfishness, as some may madly dream, in thus clinging to Jesus, with an abiding love, because, except we thus abide in him, we lose our life, our heaven, our happiness, our all. It is true that we love Jesus for his own sake, and also our Father in heaven for his glorious and blessed name's sake ; but we cannot separate this love, given us of God, from the sense of duty, which admonishes us to persevere unto the end in the use of those gospel means, which are linked by God himself with the endurance of our faith in Christ. Away then with all cavils in matters of such moment. Assured that we are in Christ, we take heed to the command to "*abide in him,*" for should we fail to do it, where would be our hope ? Our present confidence, which we dare not cast away, would quickly be lost, should we presume to think that we might dispense with the injunction of the text. But indeed, the saints do not thus cavil at God's word. It is only the ungodly who do this. It is only the wicked who urge upon the saints, that if already

in Christ, they need not be careful to abide in him ; that if the doctrine of the election of grace, and of the inevitable perseverance of the saints be true, then it cannot be needful for them to watch and pray, and to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure. But enough of these unholy sayings ; the believer still holds on his course ; he is not discouraged by the hard speeches, and intellectual sophisms of the scoffer : he says continually : ‘ Lord Jesus, help me to abide in thee, that I may have confidence when thou appearest. Thou knowest that I disclaim all confidence in self, in my own diligence, in any exertions I can make to retain my place in thee ; but make me to use diligence, and may I find it my meat and drink to do thy will. Alike deliver me from self-confidence, and from any daring perversion of the doctrines of thy word ; oh, give me a lowly heart, ever bent upon following in thy appointed track, that without murmurings and disputings, I may submit myself to thy most wise enactments. Instead of disputing, cause me to act faith in thy word ; instead of murmuring, give me a heart to love and dread thee, and diligently to keep all thy commandments.’

It would seem scarcely necessary, to go again over the ground of the believer’s confidence in Christ, lest any should connect it with their own faithfulness, rather than with his : and yet such is often the remaining legality of the believer’s mind, that it may not be amiss to enter a protest against the idea, that the confidence spoken of in the text, can have any reference, however remote, to a self-complacent view of the constancy of our own faith. It is incumbent on us to abide in Christ, not that we may display our fidelity in so doing, but because, if we do it not, we perish everlastingly. And how can we connect any idea of merit with such a faith as this ?

For shall we commend the drowning man for keeping fast hold of the rope, which he lets go at the peril of his life ? or shall he who runs and wins the race, be praised, because when the goal was in his eye, he was allured onward by the expectation of the desired prize ? God is so infinitely gracious, that he will even reward us—for what ? for being true to ourselves—for not losing our own souls—for not ceasing to abide in his beloved Son, when not to abide in him, would be fatal to ourselves. But shall we therefore take praise to ourselves on such an account ? Shall we admire our own faith and perseverance, and spirit of endurance ? Rather let us give fresh glory to God ; and let us admire the matchless grace of the generous benefactor, who first secures the allegiance of our wandering hearts, and binds to himself the affections of his people by innumerable links, and then rewards our perseverance, as though the faithfulness had been our own ! It is plain enough that the believer's confidence is utterly misplaced, if it has respect to his own constancy, rather than simply to the blood and righteousness of his dying, risen Lord. In such a course all is delusion ; we do but sow the wind, and, but for interposing grace, must reap the whirlwind. For in the awful hour of death, shall the soul be able to look on itself with any degree of complacency ? Will it be able to say, because I have not failed to abide in Christ, therefore I am confident ? Impossible. In that sifting hour, the soul will discover its unbelief and various short-comings, rather than the excellence and soundness of its faith. Its sin, rather than its righteousness, will then be discovered ; and very miserable will be the believer's state, unless he can then say, Jesus is himself my confidence ; his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension is my confidence : I do not look at my faith, or at

my abiding in Christ, as my ground of hope ; I behold the blessed Jesus himself, as " the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." I look unto him and am saved ; I know in whom I believe. The apostle's meaning, then, is this : not that we should eye our own perseverance in the faith of Christ, as a ground of confidence in the hour of death, but that if we abide in him we shall be confident, *as eyeing him* who is made ours by faith. For, " to abide in Christ," is to appropriate him to ourselves, as made of God unto us a complete redemption. And the confidence intended by the apostle, is the confidence which is connected with an appropriating faith, not, as before observed, because we trust in the appropriating acts, which make Christ ours, but because Christ is really ours ; because he has been given us, not by our faith, but by the Father's boundless love.

In treating of the important subject of faith, it is very difficult rightly to divide the word of truth. For as on the one hand, we cannot exalt the gift and grace of faith too much, so on the other, we cannot depreciate it too much, when it is put in the place of Christ, and our trust is reposed in our faith, rather than in the Lord our righteousness. As the excellent fruit of the renewed heart, and of the new principle of holiness in the believer's soul, it is impossible to commend faith unduly. It is faith alone that gives glory to God ; and hence its worth. By faith we perceive our own misery, and the Creator's glory, and by faith we yield him his due homage. By faith we appreciate the excellent attributes of our God, and acquiesce in the fitness of his decrees. It is faith which quells the rebellious spirit, and which silences the contumacious tongue. It is faith which says, " It is the Lord, let him do what

seemeth him good." It is faith which whispers to the heart, "Be still, and know that it is God." It is faith which does more than acquiesce in the Lord's most severe decrees; for faith can *rejoice* in affliction, in distress, in persecution. Faith can say with a secret exultation, I would not have it otherwise: the Lord does all things well. And how honourable also to God are those actings of faith, which have respect to his word of covenanted mercy, and to the Saviour held forth in that word! For with what a hearty and full acquiescence does faith accept of the proffered gift of God, albeit the gift is only apparently in the word. With what a full assent does faith repose its confidence in the way of salvation indicated in the Scripture! It has no reply to make, it offers no objection; God speaks; faith hears his voice, and quickly answers, I believe. Faith therefore, inasmuch as it gives glory to God, cannot be too much extolled, for we properly admire even the creature's work, when that work redounds to the creator's praise. But there is another view that we may properly take of faith, when we consider it as a merely passive grace, and then it is that we compare it to the empty hand which receives the heavenly gift, and to the empty earthen vessel which contains the heavenly treasure. And this variety, or rather, it may be termed, contrariety of expression, is aptly used, on account of the real difference between active and passive faith, and also on account of the apprehension we feel, lest the grace of our justification should be supposed to be in any way connected with the excellence of our faith in Jesus. Faith, considered in itself, is, as we have seen, a truly admirable and excellent grace. But when it comes to be considered in connexion with Christ, who is our only righteousness, we must beware

lest we so exalt faith, as to disparage the perfection of the free grace of God, and that justification, which is the fruit of Christ's resurrection, and by no means the fruit of our faith. And it is most true, that when we look at the faith which justifies, its only excellence consists in this ; that it is the medium by which we obtain Christ : and, as has been before observed, on what ground shall we commend the drowning mariner, who does not refuse the friendly aid offered him by some kind hand ? or why extol the sick man, who is impelled by his consciousness of disease, to receive the medicine which his physician offers him ? In such cases there exists no reason for commendation, although it must be confessed there would be abundant cause for blame, did the supposed sufferers reject the proffered aid, and in consequence, perish through their folly. In like manner, whilst the rejection of Christ involves the deepest guilt, the acceptance of his free grace is not accompanied with merit of any kind. We are commanded to believe in Christ, and to abide in him, and if we do not, we break the divine command. Our disobedience in such a case is open and flagrant. But if we obey, do we not greatly benefit ourselves ? and shall our fleeing from the wrath to come, and our laying hold on eternal life, and our subsequent abiding in Christ, by which acts of faith we so eminently secure our own advantage, be reckoned by us as meritorious deeds, tending in the least degree to the procuring for ourselves the grace of our justification, and ultimate glorification ? One would imagine, that none could be found to connect aught of merit with the faith that justifies and saves ; but yet too many presume to look at their faith in Christ, as though it were a species of spiritual righteousness. But the idea must be utterly discarded, and the contrary truth ac-

knowledge; even this, that faith justifies only for this reason, that it puts us in possession of the justification obtained for us by the son of God. In the ever-memorable day of the resurrection of Christ, he achieved the full redemption of his people from the curse of the broken law. But his people are ignorant of their state of privilege, till it is revealed to them by faith. In the day of their illumination by faith, they become conscious of the wonderful fact, that God forgives them all trespasses for Jesus' sake. But again we ask, shall any be commended, for such a discovery as this? Shall any be commended for seeing that which God discloses to them, irrespective of all deserving of theirs? For those internal workings of faith, which precede the faith of justification, although they may be of an active kind, cannot, as we have seen, be construed into works of righteousness, because they partake in so large a degree of the principle of self-preservation. But let not any mistake the terms just employed, as though they signified, that the soul which is fleeing from the wrath to come, is wrought upon by a faith which has respect only to the creature's selfish interests. This is far from being true; and whilst we shun the idea of investing the faith which terminates in justification and glorification, with any particle of meritorious righteousness, we would not conceal the blessed truth, that there is much of holy and loving feeling towards his God, in the heart of the poor prodigal who is returning to his Father's house, and who is longing for the embrace of those paternal arms. For we mistake greatly if we imagine, that it is only servile fear which prompts the desire to escape from the wrath to come. True, the dread of God's wrath is very grievous to the returning sinner. But why is it so grievous? Chiefly because he would

fain enjoy that smile which is the opposite of anger : chiefly, because he feels, that to be happy, he must be reconciled to his offended God. For salvation would avail but little in his estimation, did it not introduce him to the favour of his God. The grace of justification would not be so eagerly desired by him, if it were not to introduce him into the privilege of adoption. It is this he covets, it is this he longs to obtain ; for already there is a cry within his heart, of " Abba, Father." And in this experience, is there anything like an unmingled selfishness, which has no respect to God ? Far from it. Therefore whilst we strip the faith of the returning sinner of every thing approaching to a meritorious righteousness, and whilst we make his faith altogether passive in the actual reception of justification and of glorification, we ascribe even to its preparatory actings, a certain infusion of holiness, and of love to the blessed God.

It may not be altogether irrelative to our present subject, to glance for a moment at the awful conclusion of the mortal life, exhibited by some, who it was expected would have evinced in their last moments, a more perfect confidence in God. But we approach tender ground, and lest it should give way beneath our incautious feet, the guidance and faithful eye of the Great Shepherd had need to be invoked. To thee, therefore, we look up, O Shepherd of Israel, and do thou guide us safely by the " footsteps of thy flock ! " And how wavering and uncertain are oftentimes those steps, we perceive, when constrained to ask, are these indeed the footsteps of the flock of Christ ? Sometimes we scarce discern the impress of their feet, and sometimes they tell us themselves, and this too, almost in the hour of Christ's appearing, that their supposed faith has been in vain, and that their works have been a vain show !

But from whence this want of confidence, in the case of those who are assuredly the Lord's? A long life has perhaps witnessed to the reality of their faith in Jesus; a long life has in their case given evidence of many an unfeigned fruit of righteousness. But they see not their own evidences of grace, they are dissatisfied with themselves: others can believe that they are Christ's, but they cry out against their own hypocrisy, and despair almost takes possession of their souls. Again we ask, from whence this sad unpromising termination of a life apparently well spent; of a life apparently devoted to the glory of God and the good of men? From whence this want of confidence in those, who, to all appearance, have not failed to abide in Christ? Now amidst all the various solutions of this melancholy case, which are so commonly proposed, such as, nervous disease, the mysterious trial of faith, inscrutable to us, &c, only one will be insisted on, and this, not because the other solutions are void of truth, but because they are more commonly dwelt upon, and are therefore probably more familiar to the mind of the reader. And the solution now preferred is this; that the want of confidence which so many evince in the hour of death, is connected with the fact—that in life, they have looked more at their own evidences of faith, than at Jesus; and have become in a measure estranged from the object of faith, by continually eyeing their own graces. But alas, they find, that the works which will endure a considerable scrutiny by the light of night, will not endure examination by the light of that bright day which is beginning to dawn upon their souls! And where now is their confidence in the great time of need? They have been wont to repose too much on self; they have thought themselves safe whilst entrenched in their

works of faith. But they now discover, that these works are no clothing for the dying sinner's soul. Oh no; he must have a righteousness other than his own, in the hour of death. He cannot stand before God invested only in his works of faith. And sure enough he begins to discern in these very works a thousand flaws unseen before—a thousand imperfections hitherto undiscerned. But were not these works wrought by the aid of God's own grace? Were they not performed in obedience to God? And will he not therefore accept of them for Jesus' sake? Sure enough,—some of the half-enlightened tranquil lookers on will affirm,—he will accept them; and they will add, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love, which ye have shewed for his name's sake." But what says the drooping, despairing, dying soul? "The covering is narrower than that a man can wrap himself therein." (Isaiah xxviii. 20.) "My leanness, my leanness!" "Woe is me, I am undone; for mine eyes have seen the thrice Holy Lord God of Hosts." But where is Jesus meanwhile; where is his blood and righteousness? where is that elder brother's robe, in which the trembling, guilty Jacob, may obtain the concealment he desires, and the blessing that he covets? It is forgotten; it is not produced. But it is the only robe which conceals the deformity of sin. It alone can cover the believer's nakedness. It is the only garment which is impervious to the condemning glance of God's pure eye; the only one which he looks upon with favor. Why then is it not put on? Alas, in the confusion of the soul, it is overlooked. The bright glittering array is indeed at hand, for God has said, "Behold, I bring near my righteousness," but the poor believer's own works have so long been in his eye, that he can see

nothing but them. He attempts to turn away his gaze from them, for he now regards them with suspicion rather than complacency, but he is compelled in spite of himself, still to fix his eye upon them. He would fain look off self if he could ; for a whisper in his heart tells of justification by faith alone ; but as if spell-bound, he still contemplates himself, poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked, as without Christ, and without God in the world, as a stranger to the covenant of promise, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel ! His legal habits of mind, long ago contracted, and confirmed by long continuance, make it impossible that he should turn spontaneously from self to Jesus ; consequently the dying hour is unblest, and the standers-by anxiously inquire, What may these things mean ? The more ignorant believers, who are themselves, it may be, as legally disposed as the dying victim has ever been, express their astonishment that so useful and upright a life should be closed in so comfortless a way ; and they wonder how it is, that the incipient faith of young believers should be often crowned, as we see it to be, with a triumphant and peaceful exit, when the man who has so well borne the burthen and heat of the day, is destitute of confidence in the hour of Christ's appearing. But surely these persons would wonder less, were they duly grounded in the fundamental doctrine of the Christian religion, that salvation is of faith only, and that works do not justify either in whole or in part, whether before or after conversion. But who is duly grounded in this truth ? We have spoken of the more ignorant believers, as of those who are deficient in it ; but who is there that is really perfect in this knowledge ? Who is so delivered from his legal bondage, as to have nothing more to learn on the subject of justifi-

cation by faith alone ? The most experienced Christians will be the first to confess their state of childhood here, and will frankly own, that they find it a hard matter to believe at all times that their sin is transferred to Jesus, and that his righteousness is transferred to them. The words are speedily uttered, but it is hard to realize the wonderful, the momentous truth which they convey. No other truth, however, will give us a well-grounded confidence in death. There is no peace for the troubled soul, save in the knowledge that Christ died for sinners : that he justifies *the ungodly*, and that our misery, not our righteousness, is our only hopeful plea for mercy. And should there be any truth in the foregoing remarks, let them prompt us to consider, whether it does not behove us to cultivate the habit of contemplating ourselves as one with Christ, rather than as isolated beings who have to work out our salvation with the grace he bestows. It cannot be denied that we are to work out our salvation, and that too with fear and trembling, for there is a command to that effect ; but still there is a right as well as a wrong way of doing this ; and it behoves us to “ strive lawfully,” or there is no promise that we shall win the prize. And what so suitable for the poor sinner, as to eye his Lord at all times, and upon all occasions ? Indeed this is the gospel rule for running the Christian race patiently and zealously. The believer’s faith is to have respect to Jesus, who endured the cross for us, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God. The fact of his enduring the cross, assures us that our sin is taken away : his place, in our nature, at God’s right hand, proves our acceptance in the Beloved ; for looking aloft, we behold the man Jesus, and ourselves in him, righteous, sinless, and altogether pure and holy.

And can any view of ourselves, as apart from Jesus, give us repose of mind? Alas, alas, out of him we are found naked; our works, wrought in faith, and by the Spirit's aid, will not, as before observed, suffice. Our works of faith are indeed the works of sons of God, but we have need of works wrought by one, who combines with that honourable title yet another name, whose dignity we cannot reach. He who is the Son of God, *and also God the Son*, works after a peculiar manner, and by *his obedience*, many are made righteous. O Jesus, include us in the number of these blessed ones! Instruct us in the sacred art of hiding ourselves in thee. Make us to rejoice in the knowledge that thou hast clothed us with thy righteousness, that when thou shalt appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before thee at thy coming.

"And not be ashamed before Him at his coming." It will not be necessary to attempt any new exposition of the nature of the believer's confidence in the day of judgment, since it is quite apparent, that it must needs be identical with his faith and hope in the hour of death; and the ground of that faith and hope has been fully detailed. It has been declared, that Christ is himself the believer's confidence in the day of his appearing, and who but Christ can be his confidence in the day of his second coming. It has been affirmed, that nothing but the blood and righteousness of Jesus, can give comfort to the soul in the hour of death; and it must be repeated, that nothing but that blood and righteousness will give it boldness in the day of judgment. Then Christ is still our theme. Still we reiterate, None but Christ, None but Christ. We will know of nought beside him. We will speak only of his death and resurrection. And should Satan and our legal hearts suggest, Must not man's works be also spoken of, for the Scrip-

ture makes mention of them, and that too in connexion with death and judgment? We answer boldly, the believer is permitted to give a decided negative to the insidious question, and this upon the clear warrant of the word of God. And let it ever be remembered, that the office of the Scripture is to convict the impenitent and unbelieving, and to console the penitent and believing. The texts, then, which may appear to be armed against the faithful, who are still, as they well know, sinners, will be found to be directed, not against sinners, *as such*, but against hardened rebellious sinners, who will not flee from the wrath to come to lay hold on the hope of the gospel; against sinners, who cannot be persuaded that they are guilty; against sinners, who if they confess their sins, yet hope to be their own saviours. But there is no word, however apparently alarming or appalling, which can be fairly construed into aught but grace, mercy, and peace to the believer in Jesus. And if works are spoken of to them, as indeed they are, and this too in connexion with death and judgment, it is sweetly to remind them, that their works do follow them: That the poor, miserable, scanty, polluted works of faith, in which they have themselves discovered more of evil than of good, (and how much more then shall not God discover?) are nevertheless accepted for Jesus' sake: That their insignificant donations of cups of cold water, given to little ones in the name of a disciple, do not lose their reward, (Matt. x. 42.) and that their poor services to the Lord, unheeded and unregarded by themselves, shall be acknowledged by Jesus in the day of his coming. (Matt. xxv. 34—39.) But where do we find any mention of the evil works of the saints being produced to their shame in the day of judgment. Where do we find the believer admonished to fear the scrutiny of

that great day ? Far different is the language of the apostle Paul, to that which many direct us to use, in reference to the account to be given of the things done in the body. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect ? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth ? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." The Judge himself bespeaks the royal clemency on our behalf. The Judge will pronounce no sentence of condemnation ; and to what purpose then shall Satan, or the world, accuse the justified servants of the Lord ? It is probable that their malice will be checked by the conviction of its impotency, and that their silence will be ensured by the foreknowledge of their defeat. But should it not be so—should Satan appear at the right hand of the believer to resist him before the throne of God, will he hear no friendly voice, uttering these consolatory words—"The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan ; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee." Is not this a "brand plucked out of the fire ?" (Zech. iii. 1, 28.) Yes, he will hear the well-known voice of his beloved and his friend, thus rebuking the accuser of the brethren ; and again he will hear the same sweet voice of love pronounce the final sentence, replete with grace—"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger and ye took me in, naked, and ye clothed me ; I was sick, and ye visited me ; I was in prison, and ye came unto me." Such is the felicity of the saints ; such the happiness of those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered ; such the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord im-

puts righteousness without works—‘O Jesus, make it ours; introduce us too, into this state of privilege; again we pray, let us not be ashamed before thee at thy coming; give us grace now, give us faith now: continue to us that faith: be thou its finisher. Cause us to abide in thee, that when flesh and heart fail, we may find thee still present with us; and that amidst expiring worlds we may still lift up our heads, knowing that the day of our more complete redemption draweth nigh.’

29. *If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.*

In this verse we have the beginning of a new subject, which is about to occupy the attention of our divinely-instructed teacher, viz. the important one of the new birth, which we find also again and again adverted to in the next chapter. For the same apostle, who in order that our joy may be full, instructs us so admirably in the nature of our salvation by the blood and righteousness of Christ, does not fail to enlarge also upon the glorious truth, that the subjects of this great salvation are made new creatures in Christ, by a participation of his quickening spirit. And it must be apparent to all well-instructed believers, that the grace of regeneration by the Spirit, is always linked, in the Scripture doctrine, with the remission of sins and imputation of righteousness. So that, whilst on the one hand we are to guard most carefully against the error of interweaving together our justification and sanctification, (and of making the former depend in any degree upon the latter,) we must on the other hand magnify “the grace of God that bringeth salvation,” and which hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that “denying ungodliness and

worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world ; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." And sweet, very sweet to the believer, is the view of a church sanctified, as well as justified by grace. For how greatly is the love of God enhanced, by his restoring to us his image, and by his imparting to us the likeness of his Son ! And although confidence in the fruits of sanctification, and any resting in them as aids to justification, is utterly excluded from the believer's creed, he contemplates thankfully and joyfully, the comeliness which the Lord puts upon his saints, a comeliness which can be discerned by the spiritual eye, amidst all the remaining deformity of that old man, with whose lineaments those of the new creature are still intermingled. It is a fact then, that there are some upon the earth " who do righteousness." Our text, and very many others, teach us this. All through the Scripture, there is a people spoken of, who are unlike the rest of men in this particular, that *they are righteous*, and this not by imputation only, but by infused holiness. And we see and meet with this elect people from time to time. We converse with them, and discover that they are born of God. We cannot mistake the likeness which proclaims them sons of God. The lineaments of Christ are stamped upon them. The features of their elder brother are quite apparent : or should the distinct features not be his, should some of them even be deformed, there is His expression pervading the countenance, there is a beam of heaven in the eye, a smile of heaven on the lip. Surely amidst much remaining pride, we discover

“ the meekness and lowliness of Christ,” amidst much of self-seeking, a desire that Jesus may be glorified. Amidst strife, and contention, and every evil work, we can yet discern “ the fruit of righteousness, which is sown in peace of them that make peace.” Then there are some righteous men upon this fallen earth, and the saying is true, “ This people have I formed for myself, that they should shew forth my praise.” It is most true. There is a people who are as lights in the world, and they are discovered by the eye of faith. But from whence their preeminence of holiness? are they not “ children of wrath even as others;” and as such, are they not dead in trespasses and sins; “ for in Adam all die?” Sure enough, they were once dead in their sins, and the “ uncircumcision of their flesh,” but they have been raised from their death in sin to a new life of holiness. A new heart has been given them; a right spirit has been put within them. A spark of divine love has been kindled in their souls, and they love God for his own sake, and man for his creator’s sake; above all, they love God because he first loved them; and their brethren, because they are created anew in the image of God. And let none confound the work of the new creation, with man’s state by nature, as though the origin of the natural and spiritual man was not diverse, but the same. The apostle guards us against ascribing any thing of righteousness, to those who are born only of “ blood and of the will of man, and of the will of the flesh.” He asserts, that if any are found doing righteousness, we must infer that they are born of God, for the tree is always known by its fruit; and if the fruit be holy, the tree must of necessity be holy also. “ Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” We know that it is far otherwise. Then let us acknow-

ledge, that wherever the true fruit of the vine is found, there has been a previous engrafting into Christ, for "every one that doeth righteousness is born of him."

But it appears strange to the nominal Christian, that the righteousness of a peculiar people should be so magnified, in whom they affirm that they can discover neither form nor comeliness superior to their own. They cannot imagine why the works of the saints should be ascribed to a divine source, and theirs to an earthly one. Are not their works the same as those of the believer, and in fact are not they believers also? Do not they worship the same God, the same Christ, with this exclusive people? Do they not acknowledge the same Trinity in Unity? Do not they perform the same works of charity? Who can excel them in alms-deeds, and works of mercy; and who surpass them in zeal? They give all their goods to feed the poor; "they compass sea and land to make one proselyte." And more than all this; they do innumerable works that cannot be counted; and they ask, wondering, why are not these works acknowledged to be the righteousness of saints? And here indeed is an apparent difficulty; for if, as has been shown, we infer that those are born of God, who produce fruits of righteousness, how shall we refuse to acknowledge those to be God's children, who excel apparently in the same works that are proper to the faithful? The reply, though an obvious one, will not satisfy the party who make the inquiry; but how convince any of the truth, except they are of the truth: the attempt must always be made in vain. The answer however is this. That the things which are honourable in the sight of man, are oftentimes abomination in the sight of God. That the Lord seeth not as man seeth: for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord

looks upon the heart. If therefore the tree has not been made good, the fruit is evil. If the man is not born of the Spirit, his apparent good works are only carnal, and as such cannot please God. And we have here the inverse of the former proposition, both being alike true; for as on the one hand we affirm, that if any man performs acts of righteousness, he is born of God; so on the other we declare, that he cannot perform any such righteous acts, except he is previously born of God. And in this way the vain pretences of the formalist are annihilated. They are shown to be nothing worth. God is not, and cannot be mocked. If man is deceived, God is not liable to imposition. The eyes which are as a flame of fire, mark the iniquity of the acts which men admire. "The vine," so fair in man's eye, is to the eye of God, but as "the vine of Sodom; the grapes, but grapes of gall, the clusters bitter." (Deut. xxxii. 32.)

But who then shall be so hardy as to form, much less to pronounce, a judgment upon the works exhibited by Christian professors? For if the outward works are so often the same, and yet the secret principle is by no means the same, and God alone can try the hearts, how shall we discriminate the tares from the wheat? In any attempt to do this, shall we not arrogate to ourselves, the office of the judge of quick and dead? Now, although it becomes us to refrain carefully from rash judging of one another, and also to resign all judgment to the Lord, we are compelled in spite of ourselves, to pass within ourselves some sort of sentence upon all the works that come under our observation. It is a part of our nature as reasonable reflecting beings, to do this; and we have also, as believers, a new faculty of spiritual discrimination, by which we cannot help proving all

things, and trying things that differ. Sometimes indeed the brow of the beloved child of God may be so overshadowed by the diseases of the body or the mind, that we may discover nothing there but the downcast look of guilt and despair. And in such a case we pass no judgment, but entreat the pity of the Great Physician. We exercise the charity that hopeth all things, that believeth all things. But oftentimes we are compelled to confess, that works seemingly righteous, bear to our hearts no evidence of regenerating grace. The zeal, the piety, the self-devotion of some flaming professors, does not impress us with confidence; whereas in others, a word, a sigh, testifies of Jesus in the heart. We may be mistaken oftentimes; certainly we are liable to err in judgment, and therefore we are careful to stretch our charity to its utmost limits; but how painfully constrained in some cases, are our attempts to discover Jesus where he is not. We hope that the righteousness we see may spring from the new birth. But we could wish that it were more than hope; that there was a conviction of the fact in our minds. On the other hand, how clearly discernible is the operation of the Spirit in some of the Lord's saints? How evidently unfeigned the self-loathing of such and such believers; how evidently sincere their zeal for the glory of God; how genuine their love to the afflicted church. If there be truth of piety on earth, it is theirs.

A slight survey has been taken of the external righteousness of the merely nominal Christian, and it has been pronounced defective, because the individual who performs it, is not born of God. It must however be observed, that those works of nominal Christians, which are express semblances of the believer's righteous works, may be productive of much advantage to man. Witness

the preaching of the everlasting gospel, by the lips of unholy men. Here is a work, as far as the individual is concerned, altogether impious ; but yet considered in itself, what other work of man's shall be put in competition with it, for what other work redounds so signally to the glory of God and the good of man ? It must then be confessed, that the works of the ungodly may be in a certain sense righteous, when they are the counterparts of the believer's holy works ; for men will always be benefited by the works which God has specifically required to be done, however evil the individual performers of the works may be. But this concession does not apply to the case of those ungodly men, who are often ignorantly supposed to work righteousness, although they do not so much as acknowledge even nominally, the authority and law of God, as the guide of their path, and the director of their ways. Their rule of righteousness is self-derived, and they frame their pretended works of righteousness, by the self-imagined law of their own carnal minds, which, be it remembered, are "enmity against God." The other class of nominal believers, to whom we have just referred, are also, it must be confessed, under the influence of the same carnal mind which is enmity against God, but in their case, the mischief of this enmity, as it regards their neighbour, is much decreased, by the fact of their adhering externally to the righteousness prescribed by God himself. But in the case of the daring professors of a righteousness which is not derived from any law of God, what shall we say, except that they are the most pestilent scourges of human kind, and one of God's severest visitations of wrath to fallen man. And such are the atheistic and antichristian philanthropists of modern times, who invent new laws for men, under a

seeming love of equity ; and who speak great swelling words of vanity, alluring through the lusts of the flesh, and through much wantonness, the deluded victims to whom they promise liberty, whilst they are themselves the servants of corruption." (2 Pet. ii. 18, 19.) Surely we cannot err in turning a deaf ear to those who would assure us that these rebels against God, may yet "do righteousness ;" that these unholy self-taught men, may yet teach us how to live holily, and righteously, and godly in this present world ; that Christian laws may be framed by these anti-christian adversaries ; (for such they confessedly are ;) and that, in short, light and darkness may have communion,—Christ and Belial, concord,—righteousness and unrighteousness, amicable fellowship together. And in these days of modern philosophic infidelity, in these days of pretended, as well as real light, (for indeed our light is also glorious,) we should be jealous of receiving any boon from the hands of ungodly men. All the seeming gold they offer should be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, and rejected, if it proves not the true coin of Christ's kingdom. Their silver must be subjected to the refiner's fire, before we accept it as real metal ; their glittering jewels must have a place in the crucible of God's most holy word, before we can venture to receive them. "To the law, and to the testimony ; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

We dissent therefore from the opinion sometimes entertained by well-meaning persons, that avowed infidelity is no worse a thing than merely nominal Christianity ; for if nominal Christianity desires to regulate its outward walk, as we know it does in a measure at least, on gospel principles, we have some security for the performance of the works of righteousness com-

manded in the scripture. The commonwealth will be ordered after a decent manner. There will certainly be an approximation to equity. The laws of the land will not flagrantly violate the Christian's law of love, but will be modelled with a reference to Christian precepts. There will be a degree of harmony between the morality of the New Testament, and the manners of the people, and in this state of things, the church of Christ may enjoy comparative peace on earth. But if the righteousness of infidel philosophy is adopted, in lieu of the divine principles of holiness enjoined in scripture ; if man is to be our lawgiver, and not God ; and if our morality is to be fashioned in the philosophic school, rather than in that of Christ, woe be to the afflicted church ; which will scarcely in such a case, " lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." Let us then greatly value our external privileges, and let us not declaim idly against a merely nominal Christian government, and visible Christian church. Should the Lord take from us, what some account no mercy at all, they may rue the day, in which the mild rule of the merely nominal Christian state and church, as they are pleased to term it, is exchanged for the iron rod of a profligate liberalism ; or in other words, for a despotism unleavened with any particle of reverence to God, or love of man. Oh, believers, value your Christian, your protestant institutions, and look with suspicion upon all the righteousness, which is not distinctly to be traced to the law of God. Nor be so credulous as to believe, that the avowed enemies of Christ can be any thing but " hateful, and hating one another." Their boasted philanthropy, is a cheap mode of getting praise, for by their good words and fair speeches, they deceive the hearts of the simple. They serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly.

(Rom. xvi. 18.) Self is their God. "They make men," as says the prophet Habakkuk, "as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things that have no ruler over them." And why do they account so basely of their own kind; even they who affect also, (strange contradiction) so much respect for the rights of men. "It is," says the prophet, "that they may take up all of them with the angle, that they may catch them in their own net, and gather them in their drag. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag, because by them their portion is fat; and their meat plenteous." Self-love and self-seeking is in this way abundantly gratified. "Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?" Believe it not, too credulous people of the Lord, and beware of that net, which is no gospel net, but one of Satan's manufacture. And rather be content to be inclosed within those meshes, which contain, the nominal church it is true, but also the spiritual; nor seek to burst asunder the threads, which if broken, may perchance admit amongst us, more cruel monsters of the deep than any that have yet appeared to our destruction. Our internal foes are many. This is confessed; but what if the huge leviathan be let in? Will he improve our condition? Will he not rather make havoc of all that comes within his reach? He will do this, and too late we shall rue our folly.

The conclusion maintained in the preceding remarks, in regard to the impossibility of righteousness being performed, except by those who are born of God, cannot fail to disgust those who know not that God is righteous. And it must not be overlooked, that St. John grounds the former part of this knowledge upon the latter. He says, "*Ye know that every one that doeth*

righteousness is born of him ;" and this, because "*Ye know that he is righteous ;*" consequently, our reluctance to believe in the necessity of regeneration, arises from our ignorance of the divine righteousness. We invest man with noble moral attributes. We vainly imagine that he can perform righteousness by the strength of natural principles ; we account his works good, and all for this cause ; that we are ignorant of God's righteousness. To this ignorance, and to this alone, we may satisfactorily trace up our propensity to magnify fallen man, concerning whom God has declared, that the imagination of his heart is evil from his youth, and that "as soon as he is born he goes astray, speaking lies." The conviction of sin, that is, of man's sin, and of righteousness, that is of God's righteousness, are indeed inseparably linked together. The Holy Ghost imparts both these convictions to the subjects of the divine regeneration, and they confess, that God is in his nature essentially holy, man essentially unholy. God supremely righteous, man altogether unrighteous : God the Father of lights, with whom is every good and perfect gift ; man, a rebel against the light, having a darkened mind, and even rejecting the proffered grace, which would supply all his need, according to the riches of the divine glory in Christ Jesus. Nor let it be forgotten, that it is the revelation of the divine righteousness, which discloses to us our own want of righteousness. It is the manifestation of the divine holiness, which causes us to cry out, "Woe is me, for I am undone ; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips ; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." (Isa. vi. 1, 5.) It is in the bright sunbeams that our latent impurities are discovered. There is no lurking-

place any more for self-concealment. In the knowledge of him who is righteousness, we become aware of our own unrighteousness. We speak no more of our natural purity, or wisdom, or ability to do well. We disclaim all equity, all self-confidence. With Job, we fall in the dust before God, abhorring ourselves, and confessing ourselves vile; and then it is that we supplicate for that restoring grace, which can fashion us anew after the image of God, and pray earnestly for those divine influences of the Spirit, which can alone renew us in holiness after the likeness of Him who created us. In that hour, how cordially do we renounce our own righteousness! With what sincere self-distrust, with what hearty self-loathing do we importune the Lord to make us righteous as he is righteous, holy as he is holy. We hunger and thirst after righteousness: we would be filled. Such is the effect produced by knowing first that He is righteous, and then, that we can only become righteous, and do righteousness, by being born of Him.

The righteousness spoken of in our text, has been interpreted to mean the righteousness of God generally; but the expression may also be interpreted of the righteousness of Christ in particular. And in that case, the believer's attention is directed to that human righteousness which the Lord Jesus performed when on earth; a righteousness properly that of a man, but which so far from being wrought out by any merely human agency, was performed by the continual operation and efficient energy of the Holy Ghost. And it may be observed here, that the man Jesus did not perform all the righteousness which it behoved him to accomplish, in virtue of his own divinity and righteousness as the eternal Son of the Father; but rather,

having emptied himself, and having laid aside the divinity to which the essential righteousness of God belongs, he wrought all human righteousness, in virtue of the continual and inseparable indwelling of that Holy Ghost which was given to him without measure. And so he wrought righteousness, as his people also perform it, according to their measure of infused grace. With him indeed it was a perfect righteousness ; with his people it is at best an imperfect righteousness ; for as we know, the Spirit is given to the saints in measure only, and more than this, that they inherit from their father Adam a corrupt nature, which is far different from the nativity of the " holy thing," born of the virgin, and conceived of the Holy Ghost, to which it pleased the eternal Son of the Father to unite himself, when he took upon him the human nature, in which it became him to bruise the serpent's head. We must however exercise a godly jealousy, whilst speaking of the Man Christ Jesus, as emptied of the essential righteousness of his true and proper deity, lest we should seem to rob Christ of that glory of the divinity which in a peculiar sense ennobles his humanity. For the glory of the Man Jesus does not consist merely in his having had the Spirit given to him without measure, but in his being " the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John i. 14.) We cannot then deprive him of any of his divine attributes, even during his sojourn on earth, without injury to his august person ; so that whilst we behold him, as before observed, working all his human works of righteousness in virtue of that aid of the Spirit, by the help of which his people also work, we must also consider him, as exhibiting to us from time to time, the righteousness of God, as well as the righteousness of the God-man,

Christ Jesus. For in no other way can we understand his saying to Philip, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father;" nor that record of John which has been already quoted. But if the righteousness spoken of in the text is intended by our apostle to refer to Christ, it is most probable from the context, that by this righteousness he intends his divinely-human rather than his essential righteousness. For we perceive a mention made of others who do righteousness, and then it is added, that they only do it in virtue of the baptism of the Spirit. And this would seem to intimate, that those who are holy as Christ was holy, and righteous as he was righteous, must derive their powers of righteous working from the same source that Christ derived it; even from the infused virtue of the Holy Ghost.

The words of the text will however admit of our taking a more enlarged view of the subject; that is to say, one in which the work of our divine Redeemer, as well as Sanctifier, is apparent. For the concluding pronoun of the text cannot but point out to us, that same Jesus who is the author of his people's faith, and who baptizes them with the Holy Ghost. And if it is Christ who bestows the Holy Ghost by which we become regenerate, we are properly said to be born of him; for the Holy Ghost is in this case the proximate agent, but Christ is the ultimate agent, and the operation of the Holy Ghost, by which we become partakers of the new birth, is to be resolved into his gift. And here again we are reminded that Christ is the head over all things to the church; that as the Father hath life in himself, so has the Son life in himself, and quickeneth whom he will. (John v. 21, 26.) Also, that Jesus gives eternal life to as many as the Father has given him, (John xvii. 2.) and that it is to these sheep of his that he imparts

regeneration and faith, and the power of doing righteousness. "Because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil;" and not only so, "both he that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified, are all of one." He that sanctifieth, that is, our Great High Priest, imparts to his brethren, on whose behalf "he took on him the seed of Abraham," a baptism of the Spirit, in kind, although not in degree, like unto his own. He who says, "Behold, I and the children which God hath given me," will not be ashamed to call them brethren before his Father and the Holy Angels; for their birth from himself, their conformity to his image, and the works of righteousness which spring from their divine birth, shall attest them sons of God, the blessed of the Father, "chosen in him before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy, and without blame before him in love."

And, do thou, O Jesus, Lord of heaven and earth, so vouchsafe to quicken us with thy life-giving Spirit, that the evidences of our calling and election may be clear. We are utterly unworthy to be numbered with thy sheep, and also, as thou knowest, we might feel overawed in the consideration of the election that is according to grace, and not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, were we not also sweetly admonished by thine own gracious words, that "him that cometh unto thee thou wilt in no wise cast out." (John v. 37.) 'Jesus, we come to thee. To whom else can we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure, that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Gather us, kind Lord, into thy fold. But not only ourselves individually, O Jesus; there are other

sheep, wandering as yet upon the dark mountains, who have been given thee of the Father. Claim them too. Ask for the heathen ; for already they are thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth are thy possession. Consecrate to thyself a peculiar people in every nation under heaven, a people who shall shew forth thy praise ; who shall know thee to be righteous : and who being born of thee, shall bring forth fruits of righteousness, unto the praise and glory of thy grace ; a people who shall come by thee unto the Father ; who, by thee, shall obtain the indwelling of the Spirit ; the resurrection of the body, and in the world to come, life everlasting.'

THE END.

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